

Dominus Mortis: Martin Luther on the Incorruptibility of God in Christ

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DOMINUS MORTIS: MARTIN LUTHER ON THE
INCORRUPTIBILITY OF GOD IN CHRIST

by

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“I will deliver this people from the power of the grave;
I will redeem them from death.
Where, O death, are your plagues?
Where, O grave, is your destruction?”

- Hosea 13:14, NIV

“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil”

- Hebrews 2:14, NIV

“Sceleratum est, cum noveris, pium et sanum esse alicuius sensum, ex verbis incommode dictis statuere errorem.”

- Martin Luther, WA 39/II, 95

ABSTRACT
DOMINUS MORTIS: MARTIN LUTHER ON THE
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David J. Luy

Marquette University, 2012

Contemporary literature broadly presupposes that Luther's Christology represents a definitive course correction within Christian reflection upon the doctrine of God. The hinge point of Luther's innovation, according to this understanding, resides in his apparent endorsement of a *mutual* transfer of predicates between the divine and human nature of Christ. This mutuality represents a significant radicalization of pre-existing theological opinion, which is content to affirm the statement 'God suffers', for instance, only in the carefully restricted sense that *Christ* (who happens to be divine) suffers according to His human nature. According to this more traditional explanation, it is not the divinity of Christ *per se*, which suffers, but only the single, acting subject who is both divine and human. Luther's principal innovation in relation to these matters, is widely supposed to reside in his eschewal of such predication restrictions. For him, God truly suffers in His own *nature*. He does so by virtue of a reciprocal idiomatic exchange between Christ's divinity and humanity. Such, in any case, is the historical narrative now prominent within studies of Luther's theology.

The point possesses more than a merely antiquarian, or reductively historical interest. Luther's construal of God's suffering is a central feature within contemporary appraisals of his theological vision. His perceived christological innovation has also funded a host of constructive appropriations of his legacy across the many sectors of modern theological inquiry. The prevailing narrative is frequently invoked soteriologically to insist that human redemption relies upon the genuine participation of God's essence in creaturely vulnerability. In its most programmatic expressions, this interpretation of Luther has buttressed the rather generic perception within contemporary theology that Luther engineers a re-conceptualization of the Christian doctrine of God, which is significant primarily because it enables a more radical recognition of God's immanent involvement with the created order. Thus construed, Luther has understandably been mined as an invaluable resource for modern theologies of divine passibility, which tend to stress the 'historicization' of God's being as opposed to putatively static alternatives espoused within preexisting theological tradition. It is the intent of this study to critique the interpretation of Luther's Christology used to underwrite this reception, and thus create the conditions necessary for an alternative appropriation of the reformer's thought within contemporary discourse.

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INTRODUCTION

It is rather common within contemporary appraisals of Luther's significance to detect in his writings an abrupt turning point in the history of reflection upon the doctrine of God. Luther is supposed to espouse an understanding of the divine being, which departs in fundamental and portentous respects from previous inquiry. The contents of this departure signal for many contemporary theologians nothing less than the inception of an alternative dogmatic trajectory within Christian thought; a trajectory whose mantle would later be taken up in earnest especially in the latter half of the 20th century. At its root, the seminal divergence responsible for this generic perception can be reduced to a single, positive affirmation, which Luther is supposed to endorse: *God suffers, and does so in His very nature*. The existence of this claim in Luther's theology is the touchstone for many contemporary receptions of his thought.

How precisely one ought to interpret this affirmation, however, or elaborate upon its full significance are questions susceptible to a variegated array of response. The suffering of God in Luther's theology has been construed, for instance, as emblematic of a reconfigured theological epistemology, which brushes aside every attempt to know or identify God by way of conceptual abstraction; that is, apart from God's own scandalous self-presentation in the sufferings of Christ.¹ Luther's 'passionate' doctrine of God has also frequently been identified as a preparatory station of development in the *Vorgeschichte* of Hegelian philosophy, with its characteristic insistence that divine being

¹For an example of this reception, see Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 65-75.

actualizes itself in and through dialectical engagement with created history.² Such proposals are representative of kind of constructive reception elicited by the widespread identification of novelty within Luther's theology, but they are far from exhaustive in scope. They represent creative permutations of an underlying historical constant, which permeates contemporary appraisals of Luther's significance. Each presupposes that the reformer formulates an essentially unprecedented doctrine of God's being and thus introduces a monumental fork in the weaving path of dogmatic development.

The historical basis for all such "divergence receptions" consists ultimately in a hugely influential interpretation of Luther's Christology, which has accrued considerable momentum within Luther scholarship during the past fifty years. Unlike preexisting models of christological description, this interpretation urges, Luther insists that the incarnate Christ suffers, not just according to the human nature, but in His *divinity* as well. Luther's patristic and medieval forebears sought rather diligently to avoid such an implication. Within classically developed treatments of the "communication of attributes", the ascription of suffering is limited exclusively to the humanity of Christ, and to the single Person in whom this human nature possesses its individual mode of existence. Although the divine nature shares the same means of individuation (the one Person of Christ), the traditional view denies there to be a symmetrical conditioning of natures, in which the divinity can share in Christ's human sufferings.

Luther's widely alleged modification of this formulation appears trivial on first glance. It suggests merely that the reformer excises the symmetrical restriction, and advocates an application of human predicates not exclusively to Christ *per se*, but also to

²See, for instance, Peter Hünemann, "Geschichte der Christologie: Geschichte Jesu Christi mit den Menschen?" *Theologische Quartalschrift* 164 (1984): 102-120.

Christ's divine nature. The import of the adjustment, however is only deceptively slight. To insist that divinity can and *does* suffer raises urgent and far-reaching questions about the nature of deity in the first place. Once the embedded implications of Luther's christological claim are traced outwards, it becomes clear that many classically binding assumptions about the being of God must either be destabilized or altogether banished. In this way, Luther's christological divergence intrinsically commends the more expansive conclusion that the reformer inaugurates a massive re-conceptualization of the doctrine of God.³

The "divergence reading" of Luther's Christology also functions as a historical reference point within contemporary debates concerning the theological conceptualization of God's immanence within the created order. These debates usually have at their center of orbit the doctrine of divine impassibility. The development and content of a widespread reaction against this doctrine are well chronicled in recent literature.⁴ Suffice it here to state that impassibility has come to represent for many

³The logical relationship expressed in this sentence stands at the center of the present work. It will assume that the prominent reception of Luther as a decisive turning point in the history of dogmatic reflection upon God more or less stands and falls depending upon the legitimacy of Luther's widely alleged christological adjustment. If the latter interpretation accurately describes Luther's treatment of Christ, then the former appropriation of his theology must be accepted as well.

⁴A sampling of the myriad recent publications that address this debate include Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame, 2000); D. Stephen Long, *Speaking of God: Theology, Language, and Truth* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Wililam B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2009); David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003); David Bentley Hart, "No shadow of turning: on divine impassibility." *Pro Ecclesia* 11, no. 2 (March 1, 2002): 184-206; James Keating and Thomas Joseph White, *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering* (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2009); Daniel Castelo, *The Apathetic God: Exploring the Contemporary Relevance of Divine Impassibility* (Milton Keynes, U.K.: Paternoster, 2009); Richard E. Creel, *Divine Impassibility: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought*, The Oxford Early Christian studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). A fuller bibliographical overview of its scope and origins may be found in the citations contained within these materials.

modern theologians an unnecessary, and rather egregious conceptual obstruction, which bars the way to adequate rendering of God's intimate involvement with His creation. Those appreciative of Luther's christological 'adjustment' detect in it a seminal precursor of a critical and necessary objection to bad dogma. Luther's passibilist description of God in Christ is esteemed to take the *reality* of divine immanence with a greater degree of seriousness than prior formulations of doctrine were capable even to entertain.⁵ In this way, Luther's Christology is leveraged constructively against perceived inadequacies of the tradition—conceptual abnormalities, which are latent within the articulations of classical dogma. The reformer is enlisted as a catalyst for outlining new structures of thought, which are more transparent to God's passionate involvement in the Person and work of Christ.

Luther's seminal adjustment is adjudicated favorably, so long as his modern appraisers malign the doctrine of impassibility as theologically problematic. Those who *defend* divine impassibility within contemporary debates over divine immanence understandably advance an alternative evaluation. The claim that God can suffer is regarded by these 'defenders' not as dogmatic *progress*, but *regress*. Criticisms of divine passibility, like the arguments of those who defend it, are far from homogenous. Some worry that a rejection of divine impassibility signals a forfeiture of God's transcendence. Others lament the apparent re-paganization of God, which such a claim seems to connote. Many insist that an ontological entanglement of God within the *mélange* of finitude formulates a 'tragic' description of God's being, which undermines the reality of

⁵This is not to say that Luther gets things exactly right in the appraisal of many contemporary divine passibilists. Many who purport to follow in Luther's legacy understand themselves to extend the trajectories in his thought to a more satisfying degree of internal consistency.

redemption.⁶ Perhaps most seriously, a number of recent theologians suggest that the God thus ‘entangled’ seems implicitly to *require* suffering in order to achieve His own self-constitution; an entailment, which portends chilling implications for questions of theodicy.⁷ Evaluated within *these* adjudicatory prisms, Luther’s widely alleged dogmatic novelty appears far less friend than foe.

The fact that Luther’s christological adjustment has been assessed in the service of such widely divergent conclusions only bears witness to the presuppositional plurality now operative within theological discourse. This plurality represents a major reason why debates over divine immanence are ongoing, and exhibit little indication that an abatement of the controversy ought soon to be anticipated. The evaluative discrepancy must not be allowed, however, to obscure the underlying agreement this discourse highlights as it pertains to the *historical* description of Luther’s significance. The fundamental elements of Luther’s christological contribution remains more or less the same, regardless of whether the central ‘adjustment’ is regarded to be a swerve into heterodoxy, or an urgently needed course correction away from non-biblical conceptualities. Despite the starkly opposed evaluative options now on offer, the specification of Luther’s relation to modern debates represents something of a fixed constant. Whether lauded as a Moses leading theology out from its Hellenist captivity, or decried as an Ahaz offering up idolatrous sacrifice to proto-Hegelian Baals, Luther is deemed significant on all sides because his Christology is supposed to pioneer a fundamentally *new* doctrine of God.

⁶That is, a God who *cares*, but can’t really *help*.

⁷See, for instance, David Bentley Hart, “No shadow of turning: on divine impassibility” *Pro Ecclesia* 11, no. 2 (March 1, 2002): 184-206.

It is the burden of the present work to demonstrate that the underlying historical consensus (to which subsequent chapters will refer as the ‘divergence thesis’) is mistaken. The consensus facilitates a misleading appraisal of Luther’s contemporary significance because it presupposes at its root an inaccurate specification of Luther’s doctrine of Christ. Contrary to widely held opinion, Luther nowhere rejects the doctrine of divine impassibility. A close examination of the reformer’s texts uncovers an abiding commitment to this doctrine as a guiding norm for christological description. Accordingly, Luther’s Christology can no longer be identified as a seminal hinge point in the development of an alternative doctrine of God. By demonstrating all this to be true, the present study will create the conditions necessary for an alternative appropriation of Luther’s significance within contemporary theology.

The intent of this work is therefore not entirely deconstructive in nature. Its purpose is not *merely* to expose the divergence thesis’ exegetical weaknesses, and leave the matter there to rest. This study acknowledges, along with the reading it intends otherwise to falsify, that Luther *does* lay special emphasis upon the radical immanence of God in Christ and therefore represents an essential conversation partner for ongoing constructive endeavors to forge adequate doctrinal conceptualizations of this reality. It seeks constructively to resituate the *nature* of this engagement by correcting the divergence thesis’ wrongful specification of Luther’s original, christological commitments. Although its focus rests primarily upon the more basic matter of historical accuracy, the present study also addresses questions of constructive import. It explores what significance Luther’s rendering of divine immanence can still possess once he is shown no longer to reject the doctrine of divine impassibility. The central goal of what

follows, then, is to create the conditions necessary for an alternative appropriation of Luther's Christology, and outline a few programmatic gestures of what such an appropriation might entail.

The execution of this task unfolds in three stages of argument, which are subdivided into five major chapters. The first stage includes only one chapter (chapter 1), and includes a careful specification of the divergence thesis, as expressed in major historical and theological literature composed during the past half century. This preparatory identification is necessary, because it excavates and outlines the essential exegetical and conceptual claims upon which the self-purported descriptive legitimacy of the divergence thesis finally rests. The second stage of the argument contains three chapters (chapters 2-4) and is by far the most extensive. On the basis of the specification outlined in chapter one, this stage of the argument sequentially addresses each of the divergence thesis' essential claims, and thus demonstrates the nature and extent of its quantifiable, historical inaccuracy.

The product of this sequential analysis is the decisive refutation of the divergence thesis as a viable interpretation of Luther's Christology.⁸ In addition to this refutation, these chapters will also provide an alternative specification of Luther's theology as it pertains to each stage of the analysis. The third stage of the argument (chapter 5) is constructive in nature. It focuses upon the task of redirecting contemporary appropriations of Luther's theological significance. The space necessary for this 'redirection' is established on the basis of the alternative specification of Luther's christological views provided in chapters two through four. As the result of the three

⁸This refutation also intrinsically destabilizes the appraisals of Luther, whether positive or negative, which the underlying 'divergence interpretation' has mediated.

stages of argument, the present study will demonstrate the inadequacy of the prominent divergence reception and provide the outline for a historically responsible alternative.

THE ROAD OFT-TAKEN: A THEMATIC ANATOMY OF THE DIVERGENCE THESIS

Logically speaking, the attempt to verify *or* refute a given conceptual construction depends intrinsically upon the extent to which that construction's essential elements are accurately identified. In the absence of such identification, it can never be clear whether one's argument truly ever 'hits' its intended target. In the case of the multi-tiered interpretation of Luther's Christology that this study refers to as the 'divergence thesis', the importance of this anterior analytical requirement is paramount. The breadth and diversity of scholarly work on Luther's doctrine of Christ is vast. The success of this dissertation's attempt to engage this literature critically will depend upon its ability to isolate the logically and historically circumscribed elements of interpretation that lend the 'divergence reception' of Luther's theology its apparent legitimacy. To neglect this task would effectively preclude not only the success, but also the very possibility of the refutation that is embedded in this study's governing thesis.

This chapter sketches a thematic anatomy of the divergence thesis, which organizes and bibliographically documents the governing interpretive claims that reside within it. The literature survey provided in the pursuit of this task does not purport to provide a comprehensive treatment of modern scholarship on the Christology of Martin Luther. It seeks, far more modestly, to call the reader's attention to the various interpretive claims, which, interpreted from a retrospective vantage point, collectively account for the broad plausibility it now enjoys in contemporary theology. These claims also furnish the core basis of the divergence thesis' self-avowed legitimacy.

The purpose of this chapter is therefore *descriptive* and *diagnostic*. It aspires to paint a clear picture of what the divergence thesis is. It identifies which are the main interpretive elements necessary for defending its claim to historical legitimacy. By isolating the sequential logic through which these elements are typically arranged in relation to one another, this description also documents why and how recent interpreters of Luther's Christology have tended to conclude that his thought embraces a conceptual trajectory, which leads beyond classical distinctions designed to distinguish between the self-existence of God and the unfolding process of world history; a trajectory that many associate predominantly with the legacy of G. W. F. Hegel.¹ This chapter's description is also diagnostic, in the sense that the identification of essential interpretive elements also exposes the specific claims, which may be scrutinized in this study's subsequent task to de-validate the divergence reception of Luther's significance.

This chapter may therefore be understood as a conceptually organized literature review whose contents furnish the objects of critique and counter-argument in later chapters. This preparatory analysis will enable the subsequent criticisms to focus upon demonstrably refutable (and thus, also potentially verifiable) aspects of interpretation,

¹In the appraisal of most of the Luther scholars surveyed in this chapter, the classical conceptual bifurcations referenced above serve only to mitigate if not entirely obscure the radicality of God's immanent involvement with the full situation of human beings in the fallen world. The extent to which a Hegelian metaphysics endorses the actual historical development of God depends upon one's assessment of Hegel's understanding of the 'proleptic' anticipation of Spirit prior to the dialectical process of its self-actualization. At the very least, Hegel understands the proleptic moment of God's immanent self-understanding always to presume the dialectical process of God's internal differentiation in the positing and subsequent sublation of Spirit's own negation in the stream of created history. For more on Hegel's conception of the relation between God and history, see Peter Crafts Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology: A Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Quentin Lauer, *Hegel's Concept of God*, SUNY series in Hegelian studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982); Cyril O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, SUNY series in Hegelian studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

and thereby avoid the hazards of generalized or vague counter-assertion.² The tangible product of this chapter consists in a final series of concrete questions, which will determine the focus of each subsequent chapter. Before turning to the literature survey, it will be helpful, first of all, to provide a preliminary specification of the divergence thesis' centrally orienting claims. The logical organization of these claims lends the entire study its macro-structure.

A Preliminary Survey of the Operative Logic

In its simplest and strongest form, the divergence thesis operates on three planes or 'tiers' of analysis. When taken cumulatively, these tiers triangulate the 'vector' of Luther's theology in terms of a fundamental deviation from the traditional conceptualities, which are operative in both patristic and medieval accounts of the hypostatic union.³ Because he deviates in this way, Luther's Christology is assumed, rather naturally to contain as its embedded implication a sweeping reconfiguration of the

²The risk of these problems is undoubtedly heightened by the broadly inter-disciplinary and trans-historical nature of the divergence reception itself. This is simply to acknowledge the fact that the interpretation under critical scrutiny throughout this dissertation is comprised of a wide set of claims whose disciplinary setting runs the gamut of historical time periods and academic fields (I.E. the history of Christology in general, the appropriation of Chalcedon in the medieval period, the relation of Luther to patristic and medieval dogma, the development of modern philosophy and its pertinence to Christian theological reflection, etc). Moreover, these various internally constitutive parts are advanced either partially or entirely by a wide array of authors whose particular views on a variety of other matters is quite heterogeneous (in some cases, even their particular relation to the 'divergence thesis' as I have defined it, varies rather dramatically). All of these factors heighten the importance for this dissertation to be abundantly clear in its identification of the core claims that constitute a logical thread of unity within an otherwise bewildering complexity, and focus its critique on these carefully demarcated claims so as to enable transparent and focused engagement of the kind that maintains the analytical possibility for verification or refutation. In the view of the current author, fulfilling this requirement is essential for the critical investigation in subsequent chapters to possess any traction whatsoever, and avoid deteriorating into nothing more than naked, that is, baseless counter-assertion.

³Just how important this conceptual inheritance is for patristic/ conciliar Christology is a topic open to debate. Those scholars included in our survey who argue in favor of Luther's basic Chalcedonianism tend, unsurprisingly, to insist that these commitments are ancillary in nature. Their removal by Luther is thus characterized as dogmatically 'therapeutic' rather than dogmatically 'deconstructive'.

God-World relation in general. The three layers of this conceptual anatomy are mutually reinforcing. They relate to one another within a fairly straightforward linear sequence of progressive argument. Organized according to this logic, the central tiers of the divergence thesis include the following: 1) an implication-laden reconceptualization of the metaphysics of the hypostatic union; 2) a soterio-logic, which not only assumes but actually *depends* upon the suffering of Christ's *divinity*; and 3) a resultant modification of God's relation to the world, which blurs (or at least reinterprets) the mode of divine involvement within history. Each 'rung' of this progression will now be expounded with a bit more specificity.

The first tier of analysis includes two fundamental claims. In the first place, it contends that Luther decisively rejects the late medieval means of conceptualizing the hypostatic union through use of the quasi-Aristotelian concept of 'suppositional carrying'.⁴ Scholars who advocate some version of this 'rejection' differ from one another, to some extent, when it comes to identifying the alternative conceptual model

⁴This model of explanation is an application of the Aristotelian-inspired distinction between a thing's essential 'what-ness' and the individuated existent thought to sustain or 'carry' (hence *suppositio*) that 'what-ness' into discrete ontic expression. In the case of the incarnation, such a framework suggests that the subsistence of the human nature of Christ cuts against the general tendency elsewhere for specific natures to attain individual expression through their own *self*-supposition (I.E. individual 'rockness' subsists through self-individuating 'rock-supposits', etc), a pattern that, in the instance of Christ having both a human *and* divine nature would entail a Nestorian doctrine of *two* persons. So, in order to sidestep this heretical entailment, the schoolmen of the late medieval period insisted upon the subsistence of the human nature of Christ through an extraordinary instance of 'alien' suppositional carrying; that is, that the human nature comes to subsist individually *exclusively* in and through the divine supposit of the Word which assumes it into union with itself, and thus effectively takes the place of the human self-supposition that would ordinarily be the metaphysical ground for its individual existence. For more on the expansion of Aristotelian philosophy to make sense of the hypostatic union, see Marilyn McCord Adams, "What's Metaphysically Special about Supposits? Some Medieval Variations on Aristotelian Substance" *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 79 (2005): 15-52. See also her essay "Relations, Inherence, and Subsistence; or, Was Ockham a Nestorian in Christology" *Nous* 16 (1982): 62-75. See also the fuller discussion of medieval metaphysics of the incarnation in chapter 2 of this dissertation.

with which Luther supplants the scholastic alternative.⁵ All agree, however, upon the core notion that Luther discards ‘suppositional carrying’ and moves on to a unitary, explanatory mechanism, which tries to deliver a more intimate rendering of the relation between divinity and humanity.⁶

Within this more intimate union, Luther is alleged to endorse a sympathetic co-suffering of Christ’s divine nature. This introduces the first tier’s second major claim. The claim that Luther endorses a *passibilist* recalibration of Christology constitutes the descriptive nucleus of the divergence thesis. In view here is a widely accepted interpretive judgment, which identifies in Luther’s Christology an alternative treatment of the *communicatio idiomatum*. The core claim, which is necessary to the progression of the divergence thesis’ logical sequence is the assertion that Luther endorses a *mutual* exchange of attributes between the humanity and divinity of Christ, and thus insists that it is not only Christ’s human nature, which is effected by suffering and death, but the divine nature as well. This position deviates traditional treatments of the communication of idioms, in which God ‘suffers’ in Christ only in the sense that the divine *Logos* is the single subject of the incarnation, and thus the rightful predication recipient of all that belongs to either of Christ’s natures. The divine nature *per se* does not and indeed *cannot* suffer. *Christ* suffers, according to this view, but only on account of the human nature, which He assumes. Exactly how and to what extent Luther is thought to controvert this

⁵One important variable has to do with the mechanism through which Luther understands the hypostatic union in general, a question that will be treated in the first sub-unit of the first tier. Is Christ, for Luther, simply a composite product of the union between divinity and humanity? A dialectical union of opposites? A *Werkzeug* of the divine effects? A dynamically actualized speech event? The scholars included in this chapter differ in their answer to these questions, though not always in mutually exclusive ways. The main point is that their various points of view share in common a few main interpretive ingredients that the survey below will distill.

⁶I insert the word ‘tries’ because not all of the interpreters surveyed within this chapter believe that Luther is successful in achieving this higher unity.

point of view depends on a number of factors that will be explored in detail later in the chapter. Suffice it here to say that an essential component of the divergence thesis consists in its claim that Luther's treatment of the *communicatio idiomatum* endorses a communication of human attributes to the divine *nature*, and that this 'exchange' especially includes the experience of suffering.

If it is true that Luther deviates from doctrinal and philosophical constraints designed to preserve the impassibility of God, what account may be given of theological rationale according to which he pursues this solitary doctrinal course? For a number of scholars, the answer to this question is to be found mainly if not exclusively within the domain of Luther's soteriology. This line of reasoning comprises the second tier of the divergence thesis' analysis. According to such a view, God can only redeem insofar as He *truly* enters into the human situation and genuinely suffers the defects of sin, corruption and death in genuine solidarity with His covenant creatures. The salient feature of this claim is not the theme of solidarity itself, something many theologians of antiquity also emphasize, but the narrower allegation that Luther affirms a *form* of solidarity, which entails the actual passibility of *divinity itself* in Christ's saving work.

The final tier of the logical sequence draws each of the preceding threads together. It deduces on the basis of tiers one and two that Luther introduces (or at least tacitly assumes) an alternative framework for making sense of God's relation to the world. Instead of the putatively static metaphysics of his forebears, Luther is said to embrace the intrinsic, ontological relationality between God and the created order. Luther's Christology and soteriology are taken as tangible indication of the fact that the perceived incongruities of classical philosophy (infinity and finitude, eternity and history,

etc) no longer function as procrustean bed of theological inquiry. Instead, Luther points the way forward to a historicized metaphysics; a point of view, which recognizes the self-actualization of God within the unfolding process of historical development; the apex of which is the Christ event itself, wherein divinity and humanity are taken up into previously unforeseeable synthesis with one another.⁷

The logical sequence of interpretation, which animates the divergence reception of Luther's Christology may therefore be recapitulated as follows.

A twofold christological adjustment (rejection of suppositional carrying along with insistence upon the predication of human attributes to the divinity of Christ) is oriented towards a soteriology of suffering solidarity of which the essential passibility of God is a requisite constitutive part. The far sweeping implications of these doctrinal adjustments represent the inauguration of a historicized metaphysics which does away with a classical account of God's being as existing wholly and immutably intact in isolation from the events of salvation history.

The internal relationships that unite the three elements of this sequence are important to the shape of this dissertation's argument as it will unfold in subsequent chapters. As a preliminary methodological consideration, it may be observed that the various elements comprising the argument's anatomy stand or fall, to some extent, *together*. It is feasible, for instance, that an interpreter of Luther *could* argue for the third tier (a renovated understanding of the God-world relation) in the absence of tiers one and two, but such a claim would be rendered rather tenuous by its tacit admission that Luther still operates effectively within traditional doctrinal parameters, which grate intrinsically

⁷Here again, there exists considerable diversity of opinion on what all of this means exactly for how to appropriate Luther's theological insights into the present. I do not mean in this overview to over-determine the theological uses to which this general notion of Luther's 'historicizing metaphysics' has been or could be put. The reception of Hegel is itself an infinitely complex enterprise, and not one that this dissertation will seek artificially to simplify. The main point here is that the interpretation of Luther's Christology and soteriology outlined in tiers one and two has made his thought appear congenial, in the eyes of a number of scholars and theologians, to a rejection of classical metaphysics (also not a homogenous concept!) in favor of an understanding of God and history in which there is more openness to a relationship of mutual conditioning between them.

against the notion of a reciprocally conditioning overlap between God's being and the events of history. In a similar manner, it would be strange to claim that Luther endorses a soteriology of divine passibility, while conceding that he *retains* a traditional christological restriction of 'suffering' to Christ's human nature. Such a point of view could be rationally defended only if a rather egregious, conceptual inconsistency were shown to afflict Luther's thought, a thesis that, speaking from a historical vantage point, can count only as a proposal of exegetical last resort.

So, although it would be an overstatement to insist that the three tiers of the analysis just described are reciprocally *entailing*, it may reasonably be observed that the disparate components of the divergence thesis garner a cumulative rhetorical strength that is, in many ways, greater than the logical sum of its parts. It is upon the strength of these claims not just separately, but especially *cumulatively* that the legitimacy of the divergence reception clearly depends. To de-validate one element of this logical sequence is to weaken each of the subsequent claims that build upon that element's momentum. Moreover, the extent to which the claims of each tier are shown to be misleading is the extent to which the divergence reception as a whole is deprived of its fundamental warrant. It will be the task of subsequent chapters actually to pursue the sequential refutation of the major, mutually reinforcing elements. In this chapter, the sole task resides in documentation. It must demonstrate the widespread acceptance of these various interpretive claims within scholarship, and highlight the way in which versions of the logical anatomy sketched in this preliminary overview have, in fact, served to commend the factual basis of the divergence reception.⁸

⁸Three disclaimers must be expressed that will alert the reader to the precise way in which I intend this logical presentation of the divergence thesis' anatomy to function. In the first place, it must be

A Sequentially Organized Review of the Literature

Each of the subject headings within this section corresponds with a specific ‘tier’ of the divergence thesis’ analysis of Luther’s Christology. Because the organization is topical in nature, the claims of individual scholars will sometimes appear in several sub-section, rather than merely in one. The advantage of this presentation format is the fact that it locates focus on the interpretive elements themselves, and thus highlights what is logically, and historically most important to the divergence thesis’ descriptive viability. The intended product of this survey will be an extracted set of very specific claims and questions, which will provide determinate grist for critical adjudication in subsequent chapters of the dissertation.⁹

recognized that the three-tiered logical sequence is a synthetic and *heuristic* construct designed to cull together and summarize a broad range of trajectories and commitments throughout the major scholarship on Luther’s Christology. One will seek in vain to find it stated in its entirety as transparently and succinctly in the actual literature as it is summarized here. It will be the burden of the central section of this chapter to demonstrate that both the elements themselves and their thematic organization *accurately* reflect genuine patterns in the study of Luther’s Christology, and not artificial fabrications. The closest one comes to a full version of this logical sequence occurs in the work of Johann Anselm Steiger and Dennis Ngien, whose positions are mentioned in the introduction and will also be surveyed below. Second, the logical sequence is organized in light of a ‘retrospective observation of effects’ and does not necessarily reflect the self-alleged conceptual trajectory of every scholar whose work will be mentioned in the forthcoming survey. Discursive footnotes will alert the reader to the few exceptions where this is the case when appropriate. The reason these authors have been included in this survey arises from the fact that they endorse an interpretation of Luther’s thought that, whether by their intention or not, aligns on the particular level with claims this dissertation deems necessary to the success of the divergence thesis. In the interest of breadth, then, their work has been engaged. Third, because the logical sequence provided above is a hermeneutical tool for making sense of the main building blocks enlisted to endorse the divergence reception, it should not be confused with an attempt on the author’s part to isolate a mono-causal thread responsible for the *historical* proliferation of a prevalent understanding of Luther’s Christology. The intent is rather to consolidate together the most important and often-invoked interpretive elements enlisted in its defense and, by consolidating them together, to engage with the ‘divergence thesis’ in its strongest possible form of expression. The author is well aware of the fact many contemporary theologians, for instance, would feel compelled to adhere to the divergence reception of Luther even in the absence of some or even all of these elements. The present dissertation does not mean to address the more subjective question of whether such a reception of Luther *ought* to be entertained, but whether such a reception *can* be justified on the basis of Luther’s actual historical points of view as has so often been alleged implicitly or directly.

⁹The intent of the following overview is not a comprehensive presentation of each author’s work, but a chronicling of the interpretation history of a number of specific claims which together have lent plausibility to the broader divergence reception outlined in the introduction of this study. In several cases, the scholars whose work is surveyed below would be uncomfortable if not entirely opposed to this

Luther's Two-Fold Divergence from the Late-Medieval Metaphysics of the Incarnation

The first tier of the logical anatomy includes two separate, but closely inter-related claims. In the first instance, it suggests that Luther decisively rejects the late medieval nominalist account of the hypostatic union in terms of ‘suppositional carrying’. It also argues that Luther insists upon a *mutual* communication of attributes between the two natures of Christ. At the heart of this second claim is the insistence that, for Luther, the divine nature participates directly in all that pertains to the Son’s humanity, including its capacity for, and experience of suffering. These two claims are often oriented towards one another. The second (divine suffering) may be viewed either as the practical outcome of the first (a more intimate account of union), or the first may be understood simply as a necessary preparatory dogmatic adjustment for securing the second.¹⁰ Despite this close inter-connectivity, clarity demands that each sub-division of this ‘tier’ be presented in distinct successive phases. This approach will be adopted in the organization of what follows.

Sub-Division 1: A Rejection of Suppositional Carrying in Favor of an Alternative Definition of Christ’s ‘Person’

In his highly influential 1966 essay “Gott ist Mensch: Zur Lehre von der Person Christi bei den Ockhamisten und bei Luther”, *Reinhard Schwarz* begins with a reiteration

association. The inclusion of their views as part of the logical substructure that buttresses the broader thesis of ‘macro-conceptual divergence’ (that is, from classical to historicized metaphysics) is justified by the fact that the various ‘micro-conceptual divergences’ they defend may be (and have been) enlisted in service of the more expansive narrative of macro-divergence. This qualification is necessary to avoid leaving the impression that the work of the major authors surveyed below has been pressed artificially into a pre-determined procrustean bed, and thus that violence has been done to their actual point of view.

¹⁰These options are not mutually exclusive. They differ only in the perception of which ‘aspect’ is the determinative one for Luther. In either case, the two are interpreted as mutually entailing.

of Karl Holl's pronouncement that, though Luther *thought* he was simply repeating classical dogma, he actually interprets its major doctrines in an idiosyncratic and, by the standards of the early church, nearly heretical manner.¹¹ Schwarz endorses a version of Holl's insight, and suggests that the inadvertent idiosyncrasy of Luther's position most visibly manifests itself in a highly critical appraisal of Ockhamist Christology, which he derides at one point as crude (*geschmacklos*) and outrageous (*ungeheuerlich*).¹² The five sections that comprise Schwarz's essay seek to document the nature of Luther's criticism of late medieval Christology and identify what it is that Luther evidently found so offensive about it.

At the heart of Luther's harsh criticism is his decidedly negative appraisal of 'suppositional carrying' the explanatory model through which late medieval scholastics interpret the hypostatic union. According to Schwarz, Luther reacts against the ostensibly extrinsic or remote relationship that this descriptive model creates between the divine Person of the Logos and Christ's human nature. The originating factor behind this distant association is a philosophical principle, which Schwarz characterizes as the "neuralgic point" of Ockhamist Christology: the axiom that uncreated Being must be kept strictly separate from created being. This principle is laconically enunciated, for Schwarz, in the

¹¹"In seiner Christologie hat Luther das altkirchliche Dogma nicht unbedacht nachgesprochen, sondern nach seinem Verständnis der Sache interpretiert." Reinhard Schwarz, "Gott ist Mensch : zur Lehre von der Person Christi bei den Ockhamisten und bei Luther" *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 63 (1966): 289. Schwarz goes on to quote Karl Holl's verdict: "Denn in Wahrheit hat Luther das alte Dogma nicht nur aufgenommen, sondern fortgebildet, und zwar in einer Weise, die, wenn man den Standpunkt der alten Konzilien einnimmt, überall nahe an das Ketzerische anstriefte." This quote originates in Karl Holl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, I (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1928), 71.

¹²Reinhard Schwarz, "Gott ist Mensch", 292. Schwarz is echoing here a line from a christological disputation from 1540. This text, very important in his interpretation, will be discussed at some length in chapter 2.

dictum: “*nulla proportio est finiti ad infinitum*”.¹³ The problems with Ockhamist Christology, to which Luther reacts, are primarily a function of its attempt to affirm Christological teaching only under the supervision of the restrictive boundaries erected by this philosophical rule. For Schwarz, the late medieval rendering of suppositional carrying is the regrettable conceptual byproduct of this ill-fated enterprise.

How is it exactly that Luther criticizes and rectifies the extrinsicism of late medieval Christology? Schwarz addresses this question in the second major section of his essay. He does so by drawing especially from a christological disputation composed by Luther in the year 1540.¹⁴ The main object of Luther’s discontent, as expressed in this disputation, is the customary scholastic expression that the divine Person merely ‘carries’ the human nature. Luther objects to this way of speaking, according to Schwarz, because the term ‘carrying’ connotes a relationship between God and man that is far too distant.¹⁵ The formulation practically denies the human nature any share in the personal existence of Christ, thus implicitly rendering the incarnate Son something less than fully God *and* fully man.¹⁶ Such a view is able, in Luther’s view, to affirm the phrase ‘Christ is human Person’ only on the basis of a fundamental equivocation of terms.

The statement is true, in other words, *only* if the term ‘person’ is stripped of all durable content. The resultant fissure of meaning can be explicated by the juxtaposition (and analysis) of two christological statements: 1) ‘Christ is a divine person’; and 2)

¹³Ibid., 300-301. “Dieses Axiom ist der neuralgische Punkt der ockhamistischen Christologie.”

¹⁴That is, Luther’s “Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ”, located in WA 39/II, 95, 34ff.

¹⁵Reinhard Schwarz, “Gott ist Mensch”, 301-2.

¹⁶Ibid., 302. In light of this criticism, Schwarz surmises: “Es ist praktisch der Vorwurf des Docketismus, den Luther gegen die ockhamistische Christologie erhebt.”

‘Christ is a human person’. According to the rules of late medieval description, the first statements means that Christ *is* a divine suppositum. On the other hand, the second statement *really* only means that Christ is a divine suppositum, which ‘carries’ a human nature along with it.¹⁷ This rather sophisticated sleight of hand is necessary, on Schwarz’s account, in order to maintain the semantic affirmation of christological teaching within a philosophical context (*nulla proportio est finiti ad infinitum*) intrinsically hostile to its original contents. The result, from Luther’s alleged point of view, is nothing less than a functional denial of the incarnation beneath a thin veil of superficial assent.

On first glance, it appears that Luther is content simply to reiterate the substance of traditional Christology and eschew the tensions created by late medieval, nominalist philosophy. According to Schwarz, however, Luther’s incredulous reaction to suppositional carrying betrays a deeper reformulation of church teaching than the initial impression of Luther’s traditionalism might indicate.¹⁸ The crucial shift that takes place has to do with Luther’s re-interpretation of Christ’s Personhood. For him, Christ is *constituted* in and through the joining of divinity and humanity, thus making the incarnate Person a kind of dynamic mixture or composite.¹⁹ Although Schwarz admits that Luther

¹⁷ Ibid., 302-3. Schwarz advances this interpretation on the basis of a disputation on John 1:14 from 1539.

¹⁸ Ibid., 304. “Auf den ersten Blick scheinen Luthers christologische Äußerungen nicht mehr zu sein als seine Bekräftigung des altkirchlichen Bekenntnisses...Luthers nachdrückliches Festhalten am alten Bekenntnis ist aber getragen von einem spezifischen Verständnis der ‘Sache’.” In this way, Schwarz basically corroborates Holl’s programmatic statement cited at the outset of his essay. The ‘first glance traditionalism’, which Schwarz and Holl acknowledge, is likely an allusion to Luther’s regular assent to creedal orthodoxy.

¹⁹ Ibid., 304-5. This is the critical claim that will prove to be so influential in later studies of Luther’s Christology. The point is not that Christ is now a *tertium quid*, but that divinity and humanity play an equally constitutive role in the personal existence of His incarnate Personhood. A composite view flattens the asymmetry of traditional, christological dogma. The late medieval notion of suppositional carrying expresses this asymmetry well by according clear pride of place to the identity of Christ as *divine*. In this view, the humanity is merely a contingently appropriated identity—and not one that ontologically

continues to invoke semantic formulations, which are reminiscent of the late medieval view, he insists that such instances are always superficial. The apparent endorsement of suppositional carrying, which they suggest is disrupted by Luther's ardent insistence that the event of the incarnation brings about a constitutive change in 'what' the person of Christ is, a view that shatters the fundamental trajectory of late medieval Christology.²⁰

The real source of the disagreement between Luther and the Ockhamists resides at the level of conceptual presuppositions. Whereas the latter begins with an abstractly derived postulate (the philosophical assumption that an infinite distinction must always separate divinity and humanity from one another), Luther's *begins* with the identity of God and man in the person of Christ. He ignores *a priori* questions of 'whether' such unity is philosophically possible, and contents himself with the biblical affirmation of its actuality.²¹ On the basis of this fundamental difference, Luther's Christology not only departs not only from the view of his immediate predecessors, but also redirects from the meaning of Chalcedonian Christology.²² What Schwarz characterizes as an

alters the divine Son. By rejecting this asymmetry, Luther implicitly overturns patristic christological norms, even though his proximate 'target' is late medieval Christology.

²⁰Ibid., 305. "Die Annahme der menschlichen Natur bedeutet indessen nicht eine Aufnahme in suppositale Abhängigkeit, sondern ein Geschehen im Sein der Person..." Thus, although Schwarz concedes that Luther's proximate target is the Ockhamists, he still evidently feels that the differences between Luther and his context run more deeply than just an intra-medieval christological dispute in which major structural assumptions are held on all sides. See *ibid.*, 306.

²¹See *ibid.*, 306-8. This distinction is a hallmark of modern Luther research as a device for distinguishing the reformer from his scholastic context. In the opinion of this author, such a sharp procedural bifurcation represents an artificial polarization of *both* groups by underestimating the extent to which medieval theologians sought to reason-out from the biblical witness on the one hand, and the extent of Luther's employment of reason in theology on the other—the latter's well-known diatribes against philosophy notwithstanding. This pattern of interpretation will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 4.

²²The reader should note that this inadvertent deviation (inadvertent because, as Holl notes, Luther *thought* he was simply Chalcedonian) is not viewed to be a failure or defect of Luther's Christology in Schwarz's essay. To be sure, there will be scholars later (most notably Beer and Schmidt) who would use this interpretation as the basis of a trenchant criticism of Luther's theology. Schwarz, though, seems to

unsatisfactorily ‘extrinsic’ relation between Christ’s natures must be dissembled in favor of a *new* relation capable of securing a real communication of attributes between humanity and divinity.

Theobald Beer’s magisterial study, *Der fröhliche Wechsel und Streit: Grundzüge der Theologie Luthers* is strangely congenial to the arguments advanced by Reinhard Schwarz, although Beer directs his interpretation to a *very* different evaluative end.²³ Like Schwarz, Beer thinks that Luther decisively rejects the late medieval doctrine of suppositional carrying. In Beer’s interpretation, however, the result of the shift is not an increased emphasis upon the unity of divinity and humanity (even if this may have been Luther’s intent), but a conceptual fissure of unresolvable, diametric antithesis.²⁴

For Beer, Luther’s doctrine of Christ creates an insidious dualism because it advances a *functional* definition of ‘divinity’ and ‘humanity’ within the economy of salvation; an anti-metaphysical reduction that creates an oppositional relation between

fall in the larger group of those who view main ingredients of traditional Christology (at the very least, its antiquated conceptual scaffolding) to be problematic, and therefore are rather congenial to Luther’s alleged modifications.

²³Theobald Beer, *Der fröhliche Wechsel und Streit: Grundzüge der Theologie Luthers* (Leipzig: St. Benno-Verlag, 1974).

²⁴Beer provides a multi-tiered investigation of Luther’s treatment of the ‘wonderful exchange’, a soteriological motif he claims to occupy so central a position in his theology, that it conditions all other salient aspects of the reformer’s thought. In the course of his book, Beer argues that Luther’s unique rendering of this motif depends upon the doctrine of divine monergism as expressed, most prominently in Beer’s presentation, in the motif of the Devil (or Leviathan) being ‘tricked’ by the apparently helpless humanity of Christ. At the root of this image for Beer is a fundamental bifurcation between divine activity and human passivity, and Beer suggests that this programmatic dualism is reflected at every level of Luther’s theology. The result of this bifurcation manifests itself in Luther’s alleged tendency to separate all the various aspects of his theology into two, fundamentally unrelated and often diametrically opposed domains. So, for instance, there is a radical division between imputed righteousness (the grace of God) and actual righteousness (the gift of God). Or, there is the radical demarcation of Gospel over against Law that characterizes Luther’s theology as a whole. See *ibid.*, 13-33; 360-61. For one example of Beer’s emphasis upon the pure passivity of the humanity in Luther’s theology, see *ibid.*, 328. See also 344. An important goal of Beer’s study is to interpret Luther in his own context and vocabulary, and thus shed light on whether the alleged points of convergence between modern day ecumenical conversation partners are real or only illusory.

‘natures’. Luther’s functionalist Christology ironically precludes the possibility of any *real* affirmation of the hypostatic union.²⁵ Luther does not identify Christ as a ‘Person’ in the traditional sense, but invents his own description.²⁶ The incarnate ‘person’, for Luther, is theologically interchangeable with a “combative unity of *functions*”.²⁷ Because he continues to use the ordinary theological vocabulary, Luther initially *seems* to build his theology on the basis of traditional conceptualities. In reality, he subverts this traditional vocabulary by inserting a foreign element. The poisoning assumption is Luther’s view that divinity and humanity are always engaged with one another in a relation of antithesis, which can only intersect in a functional concursus of otherwise immiscible operations. In order to explicate the underlying transformation of meaning effected by Luther’s appropriation of traditional terms, Beer seeks to demonstrate the way in which the reformer co-opts classical vocabulary, and enlists it for his own idiosyncratic purposes.

Beer admits, for instance, that Luther continues to enlist the language of ‘suppositional carrying’. He insists like Schwarz, however, that the reformer makes use of this vocabulary in a manner rather different from his late medieval teachers. For

²⁵Because the only Christ that matters for Luther is the Christ *for us*, Beer perceives him to reject any reflection upon the metaphysical realities necessary for securing the union of divinity and humanity in a way that goes beyond sheer juxtaposition. For an example of Beer’s suggestion of Luther’s indifference or hostility towards abstract questions concerning ‘what’ Christ is, see *ibid.*, 329-31. For Beer’s claim that Luther ‘functionalizes’ the doctrine of two natures and thus creates potential problems for his attempt to affirm the hypostatic union in any traditional sense, see *ibid.*, 382-3.

²⁶That is, he does not regard the ‘Person’ of Christ as a suppositum; an entity ontologically distinct from the two natures individually subsisting through it.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 398. “Die christliche Metaphysik definiert dieses ‘Wer’ [that is, the question of ‘who’ Christ is] nicht-hellenistisch als Suppositum der Person, Luther dagegen als kämpferische Einheit von Funktionen.” For confirmation of this claim, Beer turns to the 1540 disputation and interprets it in a way remarkably similar to the afore-described essay by Reinhard Schwarz. See *Ibid.*, 404-6.

Luther, all of the terms traditionally intended to express the *source* of union take on a merely linguistic function. Suppositional carrying is no longer used as a descriptive analogy through which to make conceptual sense of Christ's two natures subsist together within a higher order of union. Instead, it is used to express a chronologically sequential distinction. It distinguishes between a non-connotative description of divinity and humanity on the one hand, and a connotative treatment of the two on the other; that is, it provides only a *functional* analysis of the incarnation. Christ's natures may be analyzed as they 'act' separately (abstractly), or within the dynamic coordination of their antithetical functions, which coincide in the work of Christ (concretely).²⁸ The result is not, in either case, a robust account of genuine union. Luther's rejection of the philosophical substance of suppositional carrying, Beer suggests, it is the *separation* rather than the unity of divinity and humanity that ends up inadvertently being emphasized in his thought.²⁹

Because he banishes metaphysical analysis, Luther must simply 'position' humanity and divinity in sheer juxtaposition with one another and interpret their union in the terms of a dynamic union of opposites whose respective, immiscible functions redemptively coincide for a single goal.³⁰ Because there is no higher conceptual plane

²⁸Ibid., 406. This interpretation of the abstract/ concrete is rather common in the interpretation of Luther's Christology. Its adequacy will be addressed in chapter 2.

²⁹Ibid., 412. Here Beer points out that major images enlisted in Luther's vocabulary (for example, the theme of 'covering') point more to the separation than the unification of divinity and humanity. This claim cuts against the insistence among other Luther's scholars that Luther's Christology lays primary emphasis upon the *union* of divinity and humanity in Christ. See, for instance Ian D. Kingston Siggins, *Martin Luther's Doctrine of Christ*, Yale Publications in Religion, 14 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 227.

³⁰Thus, according to Beer, the *communicatio idiomatum* expresses for Luther not the unity of God and man, but the struggle between divinity and its contrary form. See Theobald Beer, *Der fröhliche Wechsel und Streit*, 380.

retained for a classical explanation of the real union between natures, Beer chastises Luther's Christology as crypto-Nestorian. This is because Luther does not base the union of divinity and humanity in the internal continuity of the pre-existent Son as the abiding single subject, but in a concept of 'composition' in which divinity and humanity come together in standing tension.³¹ So, although many of Luther's statements make him *appear* Chalcedonian (an ostensible source of ecumenical ressourcement), the reality beneath Luther's traditional vocabulary is a Christology that departs rather dramatically from the tradition.³²

Marc Lienhard's influential book *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ* is more optimistic than Beer in affirming the extent of Luther's christological traditionalism. Despite this alternative evaluation, Lienhard acknowledges many of the alleged 'deviations' in Luther's Christology that cause a scholar like Beer to doubt his orthodoxy.³³ Their analysis differs, so far as the present topic is concerned, not so much

³¹Ibid., 380-81. "Im fröhlichen Wechsel ist nicht der Gottmensch in der Einheit mit dem Präexistenten, wie im Christushymnus des Philipperbriefs, der Handelnde. Die Vereinigung von Gottheit und Menschheit wird nur als ein Kompositum bezeichnet..."

³²Beer's controversial interpretation of Luther's theology has been the object of serious criticism from a number of fronts. A thorough evaluation of his views lies outside the scope of this dissertation. However, it is interesting to note the fact that, although Beer's *conclusions* have often been received with trenchant disapproval, the interpretation of Luther's Christology upon which these conclusions are based is not terribly idiosyncratic when compared objectively (that is, denuded of the intrinsically evaluative trajectory that conditions Beer's argument) with the other points of view articulated in the last fifty years. Like many others, he asserts that Luther redefines humanity and divinity in 'functional' or 'dynamic' categories in a way that is intentionally oriented towards soteriological considerations. Along with many others, he concludes that this point of view carries with it a 'composite' doctrine of Christ's person that rejects the late medieval nominalist notion of suppositional carrying. While these insights are carried by Beer to evaluative ends that differ rather dramatically from the majority of other authors in this survey, this fact should not obscure the extent to which his interpretation is reinforced by standard interpretations advanced elsewhere. Thus, Ulrich Asendorf is perhaps a bit hasty when he argues that the books by Lienhard, Nilsson and Vorländer all refute Beer's interpretation of Luther's Christology. See Ulrich Asendorf, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers nach seinen Predigten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 199 n. 303.

³³Marc Lienhard, *Luther, Witness to Jesus Christ: Stages and Themes of the Reformer's Christology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1982). The origin of Lienhard's diachronic study of Luther's Christology is an attempt to confront Congar's verdict that Luther's soteriology reflects a

in the interpretation they assign to Luther's apparent rejection of late medieval Christology, but in the varying assessment of the implications each author detects in this rejection for Luther's subsequent ability to remain within the parameters of Chalcedonian orthodoxy.³⁴ Like Beer, Lienhard claims that Luther defines the 'Person' of Christ as the concrete product of two natures coming together, although he admits that it is sometimes difficult to discern exactly what Luther has in mind.³⁵ What *is* clear, in Lienhard's interpretation, is that Luther redefines personhood, contrary to the tradition, *for the sake of* enabling a mutual sharing of attributes between the two natures of Christ.³⁶ Unlike Beer, then, Lienhard does not understand Luther's reconfiguration of this doctrine to leave the two natures standing in irresolvable antithesis with one another. If anything,

heterodox Christology in which the humanity is entirely passive. See *ibid.*, 13-4. For an affirmation of Luther's (pre-medieval) orthodoxy, see 18-26. Lienhard's original French edition of this book appeared in 1973. See Marc Lienhard, *Luther, témoin de Jésus-Christ: les étapes et les thèmes de la christologie du réformateur* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1973). A German edition also appeared in 1980. Marc Lienhard, *Martin Luthers christologisches Zeugnis: Entwicklung und Grundzüge seiner Christologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980). Lienhard does not understand these 'deviations' as swerves into heterodoxy, but as a resolution of inadequate conceptualities in the tradition.

³⁴Stated more specifically, I mean here to suggest that on the specific question of Luther's acceptance of suppositional carrying, both agree Luther to reject it and embrace a point of view entailing a 'composite' understanding of the Person of Christ.

³⁵For the former claim, see *ibid.*, 231. For the latter admission, see *ibid.*, 230-31; 330. The difficulty stems from Luther's continued use of 'assumption' language whose traditional intent was to locate personal continuity in the unchanged life of the divine Son, a perspective that, indirectly at least, serves to retain the doctrine of divine impassibility that Lienhard elsewhere argues Luther to reject. Lienhard's solution to this tension is to suggest that Luther espouses an exaggerated doctrine of the anhypostasis/ enhypostasis distinction in which the assuming divine Person itself enters a new reality through the full communicative participation of humanity with divinity and vice versa. See *Ibid.*, 230-35; and 328-34.

³⁶So, Lienhard's synthetic summary on Luther's account of personhood: "the person of the Son unites in itself the two natures, but in this hypostatic union a history begins, an intimate communion which Luther calls personal, in which the divine nature participates in the human suffering, and reciprocally the human nature participates in the divine ubiquity. The divine *hypostasis* thus truly descends into the history of human beings. It does not remain beyond them as an unchanging concept, but participates entirely in the history of Jesus of Nazareth. This is why Luther uses the term *person* in a double sense: on the one hand, to designate the eternal author of the act of redemption founded on the *enhyposstasis*, namely the *Logos*; on the other hand, to designate the *concretum* in which, on the basis of the *enhyposstasis*, the *Logos* and humanity are intimately united for our salvation." *Ibid.*, 235.

Luther's emphasis upon the radical union of the two natures together is *so acute* that it occasionally borders upon Eutychianism or Monophysitism.³⁷ Both scholars conclude that Luther defines the personhood of Christ with a theory of 'composition', which cuts against the late medieval doctrine of suppositional carrying. So far as Lienhard's importance in the outline of this chapter is concerned though, it must primarily be observed that the alleged reconfiguration of the doctrine of Christ's person he finds in Luther is oriented entirely in service of an alleged reciprocal exchange of the predicates of divinity and humanity in which the divine nature of Christ is said equally to share in the sufferings of the human nature.³⁸ This orientation of the first christological divergence in Lienhard's work provides additional corroboration for the sequential organization through which this literature review has been organized.

Die Christologie in Martin Luthers späten Disputationen by Axel Schmidt reiterates and extends many aspects of Theobald Beer's interpretation of Luther's Christology. Unlike Beer, Schmidt limits his study to Luther's late disputations, which he regards as faithful and concise recapitulations of the reformer's theology as a whole.³⁹

³⁷Lienhard expresses this concern in *ibid.*, 317; 344; 387. Another way of articulating the relation between Lienhard and Beer on this question would be to say that both agree Luther rejects the metaphysical strategy of locating the union of divinity and humanity in a supposit or individual substance that is somehow ontologically prior to and unchanged by the assumption of humanity. They disagree, however, on what Luther proposes as a replacement for this point of view. For Beer, the clear alternative is sheer juxtaposition, whereas for Lienhard the secondary vehicle of union remains (a concept of Person) but is reconfigured in such a way that its ontology is at least partially constituted in and through the event of the natures coming together. This parting of ways is important because it reflects both the reason why thinkers like Beer belong within the logical anatomy of the divergence reception, *and* why and how their particular understanding of Luther's divergence takes them in a direction that differs from the broader reception treated in this dissertation.

³⁸See *Ibid.*, 233. This orientation provides additional confirmation for the logical arrangement through which the literature covered in this chapter has been organized.

³⁹Axel Schmidt, *Die Christologie in Martin Luthers späten Disputationen* (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1990): 2.

Like previous Roman Catholic critics of Luther's Christology, Schmidt presupposes a mutually determinative relation between Luther's soteriology and his Christology, and argues on its basis that, although Luther often enlists traditional christological vocabulary, the quasi-dualist antinomies that fracture his understanding of salvation preclude any meaningful affirmation of the personal unity of divinity and humanity in Christ.⁴⁰ Schmidt seeks to document the fissure's existence on the basis of Luther's late christological disputations.⁴¹

At the root of Luther's christological problems, for Schmidt, is an irresolvable antithesis between theology and philosophy that casts its shadow over the reformer's thought as a whole.⁴² Luther's inability to maintain an orthodox doctrine of either the Trinity or Christ is but one byproduct of a deeper problem in the DNA of his theology itself. According to Schmidt, Luther's rejection of the late nominalist view of suppositional union catches the reformer on the horns of a rather ironic dilemma. On the one hand, Luther's rejection is animated by a concern for a *deeper* mode of union. Yet, the very distinction he denies provides the only conceptual vehicle capable of securing union without sheer antithesis.⁴³ Without the conceptual framework of suppositional carrying, Luther's Christology must terminate, inevitably, either in a relation of standing dialectical opposition (as Beer argues), or distinction-erasing, synthetic fusion. Schmidt concedes that Luther *tries* to affirm the Chalcedonian definition as normative. In the

⁴⁰On the alleged mutual determinacy of these loci, see *ibid.*, 14-5; 178-80. Beer pursues a similar line of argument Theobald Beer, *Der fröhliche Wechsel und Streit: Grundzüge der Theologie Luthers* (Leipzig: St. Benno-Verlag, 1974). Among the first to advance a version of this opinion is Yves Congar.

⁴¹In doing so, he leans rather heavily upon the work of Reinhard Schwarz.

⁴²See Axel Schmidt, *Die Christologie in Martin Luthers späten Disputationen*, 220-33.

⁴³That is, a unity without mixture or separation.

absence of a philosophically dense distinction between ‘persons’ and ‘natures’, however, Schmidt concludes that Luther inadvertently espouses a form of monophysitism with paradoxically Nestorian resonances to it.⁴⁴ Like Schwarz and Beer, Schmidt argues that although Luther sometimes *sounds* as if he retains the late medieval mechanism of suppositional carrying (and with it a traditional rendering of the distinction between persons and natures), he actually rejects it in favor of an alternative proposal.⁴⁵

Another important book recently arguing for a dramatic departure on Luther’s part from the explanatory mechanism of suppositional carrying is *Christus Praedicatus et Creditus: Die reformatorische Christologie Luthers in den Operationes in Psalmos (1519-1521)* by Florian Schneider.⁴⁶ Schneider suggests that Luther develops a decidedly ‘reformational Christology’ in his second commentary on the Psalms; that is, he articulates a doctrine of Christ closely coordinated with the new doctrine of justification that emerges in his thought for the first time towards the end of the second decade of the

⁴⁴Ibid., 247. That is, Luther holds the union together only on the basis of a dialectical fusion of opposites. Without a second conceptual tier in place to hold these two things together (I.E. a suppositum), Luther is left with either a monophysite account of their union, or a Nestorian account of their distinction. The dialectical character of Luther’s thought tends in both directions, and hence Schmidt’s invention of an unprecedented (and apparently self-contradictory) heresy to describe the contents of Luther’s thought. The reason that Luther is deemed primarily to be a monophysite is because he clearly lays emphasis upon ‘union’, but does so without a doctrine of Christ’s ‘Person’ as distinct from the natures. See also *ibid.*, 199-200. For Schmidt’s interpretation of Luther’s view of the hypostatic union, see 234-50. The reader should also note that Schmidt appeals explicitly to Lienhard’s interpretation of Luther on the ‘person’ of Christ to support his understanding. See *ibid.*, 246 n. 73. The root of this dialectical Christology and its alleged rejection of ‘Person’ as a ‘subsisting supposit’ are located finally by Schmidt in Luther’s defective soteriology, which is the driving force of his theology. *Ibid.*, 250.

⁴⁵Schmidt concedes Luther’s *apparent* traditionalism in *ibid.*, 241; 246-7. Schmidt draws support for his interpretation of a fundamental departure from both Schwarz and Lienhard. For Schmidt’s interaction with Schwarz, see *ibid.*, 234f. For his citation of Lienhard, see page 246. Schmidt is critical of Schwarz’s pessimistic interpretation of Ockhamist Christology, preferring instead to see it as a particular vocabulary for affirming a traditional distinction. However, despite his criticism of Schwarz on the nominalists, he accepts his view that Luther criticizes their Christology and diverges decisively from it. Here we see an example of a common analysis with internally divergent evaluations.

⁴⁶Florian Schneider, *Christus praedicatus et creditus: die reformatorische Christologie Luthers in den "Operationes in Psalmos" (1519-1521), dargestellt mit beständigem Bezug zu seiner Frühzeitchristologie* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2004).

16th century.⁴⁷ As the result of this shift, Luther no longer concerns himself with an ‘abstract’ or ‘formal’ presentation of Christ. His interest is limited to reflection upon Christ *only as conjoined* with the believer’s subjective appropriation of salvation. This new dogmatic orientation carries with it, for Schneider, a fundamental shift away from classical Christological reflection.⁴⁸ One of its more prominent consequences is the fact that Luther no longer conceives of ‘natures’ as static but rather as dynamic, or functional realities.⁴⁹ Luther’s Christology is no longer bound to abstract, scholastic conceptualities, but refers instead to the subjective consciousness of the man Christ.⁵⁰ Interpreted in this manner, Schneider suggests that Luther’s doctrine of a radical simultaneity between Jesus’ divinity and humanity demolishes Aristotelian philosophy with its restrictive prohibition against a ‘coincidence of opposites’.⁵¹

So, Luther is alleged by Schneider to move beyond not just the late medieval understanding of ‘suppositional carrying’ but beyond the formulation of two-nature Christology itself, since there is no longer a simultaneity of two distinct substantial-

⁴⁷ See *ibid.*, 2-3; 10; 61; 100.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 81. So, for instance, Schneider here insists that Luther no longer entertains the notion of a Christ in himself, but knows only of the Christ *pro nobis*. The ontological implications of this view are made clear in the following statement: “Christus mag auch Person für sich selbst sein, aber erst im Sich-selbst-Ausschenken hat er seine eigentliche Identität. Luthers These lautet, daß Christus gerade in seinem Für-uns-Sein sein An-sich-Sein realisiert.”

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 115-6.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 117. “Im Zentrum stehen nicht die der Zweinaturenlehre verpflichteten scholastischen physischen und hyperphysischen Kategorien (persona, natura, substantia, suppositum, pars inferior et superior etc.), sondern die von Christus gemachte und insofern subjektbezogene Gewissenserfahrung.” Also important is Schneider’s explanation on page 177: “Die Einheit zwischen Menschlichem und Göttlichem wird nicht mehr mit Hilfe von Naturkategorien beschreiben, sondern durch konkrete Bewußtseinsgehalte Christi. Es geht Luther nicht um die Simultaneität zweier substanzontologisch verstandener Naturen. Vielmehr werden dynamische und affektuale Begriffe zur Beschreibung des polaren Seins Christi in Anschlag gebracht.”

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 176. Here there is a latent similarity with Schwarz, who also argues that the *actuality* of divine-human union overcomes all discourse, which questions its philosophical possibility.

ontological natures. Instead, the person of Christ is constituted through the dynamic and subjective coming together of contrary predicates within the concrete consciousness of Jesus.⁵² For Schneider, it is enough in Luther's mind simply to assert paradoxical statements of the being of Christ within an acutely sharpened, discursive polarity. Luther redefines the personhood of Christ as the "concrete speaking together of opposites" in which such polarities collide. The personal union of divinity and humanity is termed a 'Sprachereignis'.⁵³ Luther overcomes the Ockhamist notion of a suppositional union by understanding the person of Christ to be the result of a speech event that takes place in the prayer of Christ.⁵⁴

In this sub-section's brief documentation, it has become clear that a common thread unites a number of recent, major works on Luther's understanding of the hypostatic union. According to this view, Luther clearly rejects the late medieval doctrine of Christ's personhood and supplanting it with something radically different.⁵⁵ In most cases, this radically different alternative is characterized as advocating a 'composite' understanding of the hypostatic union, although what exactly is meant by this varies from author to author. In order to explore a commonly identified product (and impetus) of this reconfiguration, this chapter now turns to the second aspect of the divergence thesis' first

⁵²Ibid., 198-9.

⁵³See *ibid.*, 181 and 190. See also 209-10; 351-5.

⁵⁴Ibid., 190.

⁵⁵We may also note that Schneider understands an important result of this reconfiguration to be the attribution of suffering to the divine nature over against the lingering docetism of the tradition. This again demonstrates the logical inter-connectivity between various tiers expressed in the sequential arrangement of this chapter. See Schneider, 135; 148; 355. Another book that reproduces the main themes of Schwarz's seminal essay as far as Luther's relation to suppositional carrying is concerned is Stefan Streiff, *Novis linguis loqui" Martin Luthers Disputation über Joh 1,14 "verbum caro factum est" aus dem Jahr 1539* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1993).

tier of analysis; the allegation that Luther's doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* espouses a two way communication between natures in which the divine nature suffers. This survey will require tracing additional claims made by authors already cited, and introducing others who build upon their work.

Sub-Division 2: The Divine Nature of Christ also Suffers

The focus of Schwarz's essay rests primarily upon Luther's rejection of the late medieval nominalist mechanism for conceptualizing the hypostatic union. In addition to this main emphasis, however, Schwarz also makes it clear that the primary intended result of Luther's christological adjustment is an altered understanding of the relationship that exists between Christ's natures. According to Schwarz, Luther measures the success or viability of any doctrine of the hypostatic union against its capacity to support a robust account of the communication of idioms.⁵⁶ Such an account includes, for Schwarz, the mostly unprecedented assertion that the divine nature shares also in the attributes of the human nature.⁵⁷ The result, as Schwarz briefly indicates, is that, although Luther continues to enlist qualificatory addenda such as *secundum humanitatem*, which are

⁵⁶Reinhard Schwarz, "Gott ist Mensch", 309. It is fairly common, within recent scholarship on Luther's Christology, to insist that Luther lays a previously unprecedented degree of emphasis upon the communication of idioms. See, for instance Oswald Bayer, "Das Wort ward Fleisch: Luthers Christologie als Lehre von der Idiomenkommunikation," In *Creator est creatura* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 23; and Johann Anselm Steiger, and Carolyn Schneider, "The Communicatio Idiomatum as the Axle and Motor of Luther's Theology." *Lutheran Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (June 1, 2000): 125. The present author regards claims of this kind to be overstatements. Luther's late medieval predecessors were *highly* concerned with the *communicatio idiomatum*, and discussed it at considerable length. So far as patristic precedent is concerned, it hardly seems fair to suggest that this doctrine is uniquely central for Luther, when John Anthony McGuckin can summarize of Cyril of Alexandria that "the communicatio is shorthand for his whole doctrine of the incarnation as a transforming transaction whereby human nature is appropriated by God and deified in the process." John Anthony McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: The Christological Controversy: Its History, Theology, and Texts*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae, v. 23 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 192.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 311-2. "Es soll nur unterstrichen werden, daß Luther ebenso die andere Seite der communicatio idiomatum ganz erst nimmt. Die göttliche Natur hat teil an allen Eigentümlichkeiten der menschlichen Natur, also an allem, was zum irdischen Dasein des Menschen gehört."

traditionally intended specifically to protect the abiding impassibility of divinity, his doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* makes clear that the divine nature of Christ truly suffers along with the humanity.⁵⁸ Such addenda do not, then, in any way suggest that Luther proscribes a real, two-way communication between natures. Their function, in Schwarz's interpretation, is simply to identify the proper nature from which equally shared attributes like suffering derive their origin within the concretion of Christ's Person.⁵⁹ Luther's christological course correction includes an affirmation of divine suffering.

Also seminal in the development of the divergence interpretation of Luther's Christology, though more restrictively occupied with Luther's doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* is the work of Kjell Ove Nilsson, whose book *Simul: Das Miteinander von Göttlichem und Menschlichem in Luthers Theologie* first appeared in 1966, more or less at the same time as the essay by Schwarz.⁶⁰ There is, for Nilsson, a clear terminological continuity between Luther and the theologians of medieval scholasticism in their shared use of vocabulary such as 'person', and 'nature', but he insists a vast difference to separate the way in which both groups make use of these terms. While the scholastics identify persons and natures as static metaphysical substances possessing certain pre-determined properties, Luther fills them with 'dynamic'

⁵⁸Ibid., 311-3. So, Schwarz argues, although it is clear to most that Luther thinks the humanity can and does share in the attributes of divinity (as the Eucharistic debates demonstrate), he stresses the fact that he insists upon the reverse of this relationship just as seriously.

⁵⁹Ibid., 312-3. As we have already commented, this 'sequential' interpretation of Luther's language will be addressed as a central component of the second chapter.

⁶⁰Kjell Ove Nilsson, *Simul: Das Miteinander von Göttlichem und Menschlichem in Luthers Theologie*, Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte, Bd. 17 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966).

content.⁶¹ This means, for Nilsson, that humanity and divinity are defined primarily in light of their respective ‘roles’ in the salvation event.⁶² Nilsson is less clear in his book than the essay by Schwarz on how exactly this new content pushes Luther’s definition of ‘personhood’ away from the views of late medieval nominalism.⁶³ The functionalizing (non-speculative) impetus of his interpretation could certainly be taken to imply that the personal union ought simply to be understood in terms of an inseparable, dynamic co-working of divinity and humanity in the same salvific event that is itself constitutive of the Person. Nilsson stops short of this view, though. His treatment is more attentive to the ongoing role of traditional concepts within Luther’s vocabulary that proscribe such a position, even if he thinks ultimately that Luther’s Christology fundamentally transforms this vocabulary from the inside out.⁶⁴

⁶¹Ibid., 186-7. “Man darf Luther zufolge den Naturen keinen naturalistischen und metaphysischen Inhalt beilegen, sondern muß sie in einer dynamischen, beweglichen und lebendigen Weise definieren, so daß der Begriff Natur eigentlich die Bedeutung Werk erhält, menschliches Werk und göttliches Werk.” “Divinitas und humanitas sind keine quantitative Größen oder metaphysischen Kontraste, sondern diese Worte sind auf eine *neue Weise* zu verstehen, und nicht nur, als bezeichneten sie ein Verhältnis zwischen Unendlichem und Endlichem, Volkommenem und Unvollkommenem, Unveränderlichkeit und Wechsel.” Nilsson does not think, though, that this means that Luther wanted to eliminate completely the concept of nature from his theology. At the very least, the conservative tendencies of his theology show up in his preservation of the term even if, as Nilsson suggests, he attaches to it his own peculiar meaning.

⁶²Ibid., 232-3. Nilsson admits that Luther also assigns certain ‘metaphysical’ predicates to the natures, but claims that this aspect of his thought is secondary to his dynamic emphasis. Nilsson makes a similar point on page 209 when he claims: “Hier finden wir also wieder, daß Luthers Auffassung von den Naturen Christi nicht durch abstrakte und spekulative Erwägungen bestimmt ist. Entscheidend ist vielmehr die Darstellung von Leben und Versöhnungswerk Christi, sein Kampf und Sieg, seine Entblößung und Verherrlichung. Dies drückt Luthers Beschreibung dessen, was Göttlich und Menschlich ist, seinen Stempel auf.” These sorts of claims bear a striking resemblance to Beer’s claim that Luther ‘functionalizes’ the two natures of Christ, though Nilsson would certainly not share Beer’s appraisal of the shift.

⁶³Nilsson’s characterization of ‘scholastic Christology’ is mostly content to comment that it is ‘speculative’, ‘abstract’, and ‘metaphysical’ and does not, for the most part, get in to the finer points of which explanatory mechanisms are enlisted to make sense of the hypostatic union.

⁶⁴Ibid., 179-81. Note, for instance, Nilsson’s affirmation here that the divine Person assumes to itself a human nature, thus avoiding the implication that the Person of Christ is constituted by the coming together of dynamic natures. Lienhard will also affirm something like this, though still suggest that the divine Person enters a new mode of existence in the incarnation, thus rendering Christ’s person a composite. On Lienhard, see above.

Nilsson's primary attention rests upon Luther's doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*, which he takes to be the organizing center of the reformer's entire theology.⁶⁵ His book seeks on the basis of this conviction to interpret Luther's doctrine of Christ (along with other major aspects of his theology) entirely in light of it.⁶⁶ So, what is the communication of attributes in Nilsson's interpretation of Luther, and what sort of exchange between divinity and humanity does it inaugurate? For Nilsson, Luther's treatment of the *communicatio idiomatum* is motivated entirely by soteriological concerns.⁶⁷ Nilsson shares Schwarz's view that the medieval period makes use of *secundum quid* qualifiers in order to protect the integrity of a preconceived philosophical polarity between divinity and humanity. This is a starting point that Luther simply does not share.⁶⁸ Luther's focus is *soteriologically determined*, and this entails a fundamental re-definition of what one means by 'nature', 'person', 'God', 'humanity', etc. Luther's doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* appears in some cases to dissolve the distinction between natures altogether, and thus tend towards a species of monophysitism. Nilsson insists, however that such an accusation falls well short of Luther's actual point of view.⁶⁹ The main point is simply that divinity and humanity are united in a single act of God,

⁶⁵Ibid., 228. "Hier können wir nun folgende These aufstellen: weil für Luther alles darauf ankommt, daß Christus wirklich das einheitliche, gottmenschliche Erlösungswerk pro nobis ausgeführt hat, und weil die Einheitlichkeit dieser Handlung ihrerseits mit der unitas der Person zusammenhängt, wobei die communicatio-Lehre das Zentrum bildet, deswegen macht die communicatio idiomatum das Herzstück der Theologie Luthers aus."

⁶⁶In this respect, Nilsson is an interesting precursor to the work of later scholars like Johann Anselm Steiger who will later claim Luther's unique doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* to be the center and animating principle of his entire theology. For more on Nilsson's interpretation of the communication of attributes as well as others following in his wake, see below.

⁶⁷Ibid., 227.

⁶⁸Ibid., 237. This, despite the fact that Nilsson is clearly aware that Luther continues to make use of such qualifiers. See, for instance, his citation of similar phrases in Luther on page 181. The question of how these qualifiers are employed in Luther's theology will be a major point of focus in chapter 2.

⁶⁹Ibid., 237-8.

which is carried out by Christ, an act in which the distinct soteriological functions pertaining to each nature remain distinguishable from one another.⁷⁰

Luther will often speak of this lingering distinction in rather traditional ways, by Nilsson's own admission. This may make it *appear* that he accepts the classical proscriptive boundaries, which deny any sharing of Christ's divine nature in the sufferings of the human nature. Nilsson argues, however, that Luther pushes beyond these restrictive borders, even though later Lutheran theology re-erects them.⁷¹ Although there is at least a verbal tension in Luther's discussion of this question (stemming from his concern to emphasize both union and distinction), Nilsson concludes that, in the final analysis, Luther embraces the *genus tapeinoticum* (the communication of human attributes to the divine nature) as the symmetrical correlate of the *genus maiestaticum* (the communication of divine attributes to the human nature).⁷² Nilsson makes sense of Luther's occasional caveat that divinity does *not* suffer, by emphasizing the reformer's oft-enlisted distinction between abstract and concrete statements. Nilsson insists that this distinction is used by Luther to differentiate statements, which apply to each nature 'prior to' or 'outside' of their union in Christ (abstract), and statements, which now apply

⁷⁰Ibid., 244-5.

⁷¹Ibid., 237-8 n. 37-8.

⁷²Ibid., 249-50. The fact that Nilsson admits an unevenness in the evidence for this interpretation is to his credit. Not all proponents of the divergence interpretation are so forthcoming about the fact that Luther at least *sounds* in many places like he reproduces the traditional view which denies any suffering of the divine nature. How such apparently heterogeneous evidence ought to be interpreted will be another key focus of chapter 2. The *genus* mentioned here reflect the later language that emerged in the intra-Protestant and intra-Lutheran debates of the mid to late 16th century. Very briefly, the *genus maiestaticum* refers in this literature to the real sharing of the human nature in the predicates of divinity (most famously, the possibility or actuality of the human nature being present in more than one place as would be necessary for its real presence in the Lord's Supper). The *genus tapeinoticum* refers to the sharing of the divine nature in the predicates of the human nature. The Christology of the Lutheran confessions rejects this genus, although the confessions do not name it as such.

equally to *both* natures on the basis of their union (concrete).⁷³ So, while ‘divinity-considered-on-its-own’ does not suffer, the divine nature *does* suffer within the hypostatic union.⁷⁴

Marc Lienhard acknowledges an apparent endorsement of divine impassibility in several of Luther’s written texts. He argues, though, that this traditional point of view is progressively mitigated over the course of Luther’s theological development. Lienhard points to an implicit departure from the doctrine of divine impassibility already in some of Luther’s very early works, but suggests that it took some years for this seminal insight to develop and consistently integrate with the more technical aspects of Luther’s theological vocabulary like his discussion of the *communicatio idiomatum*.⁷⁵ In fact, Lienhard admits that Luther never carried this progression to its entirely consistent end. He points out vestiges of the classical view (I.E. that the divine nature does not suffer), which remain even in the later years of Luther’s life.⁷⁶ Despite these mitigating factors, however, Lienhard is convinced that Luther clearly espouses a mutual communication of attributes between natures, a communication which includes the sharing of Christ’s

⁷³Ibid., 255-7. This seems to be the explanatory mechanism through which Nilsson also makes sense of *secundum quid* qualifiers in Luther’s christological vocabulary. Here we observe yet another ‘sequential’ interpretation of Luther’s qualificatory discourse.

⁷⁴Nilsson summarizes his interpretation in the following closing statement: “Göttliches und Menschliches haben beide ihre speziellen Eigenarten und können niemals gegenseitig identifiziert werden; sie sind im Gegenteil die äußersten Gegensätze ihrer selbst, aber durch die *communicatio idiomatum* ist Gott mit dabei, offenbart er sich und handelt er mit dem Menschlichen zusammen, und dadurch sind Gott und Mensch in Christus zu einer Einheit verbunden, sodaß alles, was in Hinsicht auf Person und Werk Christi über die Gottheit gesagt werden kann, auch der Menschlichkeit gilt—und umgekehrt, jedoch ohne alle Verwandlung oder Vermengung.” Ibid., 260.

⁷⁵Marc Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, 25; 53. For Lienhard, the Alexandrian notion of a one-way communication from divinity to humanity risks Docetism; a verdict that reveals some of the presuppositions that animate his views of Christology in general. See *ibid.*, 336.

⁷⁶Thus, there is an unresolved fracture in Luther’s thought, as Lienhard explains in *ibid.*, 379.

divinity in the sufferings of his humanity.⁷⁷ The break with traditional conceptualities may not be as tidy as one could hope, but the break nevertheless exists.

Luther's use of qualifying distinctions traditionally enlisted to proscribe this implication (*secundum quid* qualifiers and the abstract/ concrete distinction) is interpreted by Lienhard through frameworks similar to those already developed by Schwarz and Nilsson. In the final evaluation, Lienhard suggests that the contents of Luther's new christological point of view comports rather awkwardly with the traditional vocabulary that Luther enlists as a matter of habit and cultural inertia. In order to articulate Luther's views with a greater degree of consistency, one would need to do away with the analytical categories Luther takes for granted by virtue of his late medieval context.⁷⁸

Important works by Johann Anselm Steiger and Dennis Ngien also detect in Luther's treatment of the *communicatio idiomatum* includes a semi-revolutionary endorsement of divine passibility.⁷⁹ Like Nilsson, Ngien acknowledges the textual difficulties involved with making this case. He concedes that Luther's insistence upon divine suffering emerges only occasionally within the reformer's late writings. Earlier works preserve the proscriptive contents of traditional descriptions, which rule out any suffering of Christ's divinity as such. In this respect, Ngien shares Lienhard's view that

⁷⁷Ibid., 31; 138; 339-42.

⁷⁸Ibid., 345; 374. Here we see a 'new wine in old wine skins' interpretation. For more on this, see chapter 4.

⁷⁹See Dennis Ngien, *The Suffering of God According to Martin Luther's 'Theologia Crucis'* (Vancouver: Regent College Pub, 2005); Dennis Ngien, "Chalcedonian Christology and Beyond: Luther's Understanding of the Communicatio Idiomatum" *Heythrop Journal* 45 (2004): 54-68; Johann Anselm Steiger, "Die communicatio idiomatum als Achse und Motor der Theologie Luthers: Der 'fröhliche Wechsel' als hermeneutischer Schlüssel zu Abendmahlslehre, Anthropologie, Seelsorge, Naturtheologie, Rhetorik und Humor" *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 38, no. 1 (January 1, 1996): 1-28. See also Steiger's later articulation of this same argument in Steiger, Johann Anselm. *Fünf Zentralthemen der Theologie Luthers und seiner Erben: Communicatio, Figura, Imago, Maria, Exempla*. Leiden: Brill, 2002.

Luther's work is internally inconsistent, even if both ultimately insist the overall trajectory of the reformer's to tilt decidedly in the direction of a doctrine of divine passibility. Florian Schneider postulates a similar commitment to the suffering of the divine nature in Luther's presentation of the communication of idioms, and argues that Luther's reconfigured Christology as a whole overcomes the latent docetism of the patristic and medieval tradition.⁸⁰ This same basic point of view is reflected quite broadly throughout modern literature on Luther, whether historical or theological in nature.⁸¹

Luther's alleged christological rejection of divine impassibility is dependent upon the more fundamental claim that he also rejects the overarching framework of late medieval Christology in general. The two are genetically related in the view of many authors because Luther's ardent commitment to a doctrine of reciprocal communicative exchange seems to *require* a complete overhaul of the late medieval conceptualities. Its theory of the hypostatic union is especially egregious, because 'suppositional carrying' is assumed to permit only an 'extrinsic', if not quasi-Nestorian, account of the relationship

⁸⁰Florian Schneider, *Christus Praedicatus et Creditus*, 117-9; 135; 148. "Die kreuzes- und leidenstheologischen Aussagen Luthers implizieren eine kritische Stimme gegen das Axiom von Gottes Unveränderlichkeit und Leidensunfähigkeit." For Schneider, the main point has to do with the unprecedented depth to which Luther was willing to attribute the full experience of 'Anfechtung' to Christ, an attribution that traditional christological commitments prevented others in the tradition from entertaining. With Schneider, it is not so much a matter of affirming the mutual communication between humanity and divinity, but a complete reconfiguration of the categories responsible for the question itself. Nevertheless, within this 'reconfiguration', he is clear that God truly participates in experiences or activities associated with the humanity.

⁸¹A few examples here include Jens Wolff, *Metapher und Kreuz: Studien zu Luthers Christusbild* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 426; Sibylle Rolf, "'Christum und nichts anders': die Kommunikation von Gott und Mensch und die Predigt des Evangeliums" *Luther* 80, no. 3 (January 1, 2009): 158 n. 26; Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 115; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 232-3; and Ted Peters, *God--the World's Future: Systematic Theology for a Postmodern Era* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 206-9. Thomas Weinandy seems to presuppose more or less the same interpretation of Luther, but would evaluate the resultant shift rather differently. See Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame, 2000), 185.

between divinity and humanity in Christ. Luther's divergence away from suppositional carrying is a necessary 'clearing of the ground' to make space for the dynamic, and communicative character of his thought.⁸²

A Soteriology of Requisite Divine Passibility

The previous section's documentation of the divergence reception's first 'tier' of analysis focused primarily upon 'whether' Luther deviates from late medieval Christology according to recent major literature, and if so, 'how' he does so. The result of the survey so far has shown that much scholarship assumes an affirmative response to the former question, and insists that Luther's endorsement of divine passibility represents an essential starting point for addressing the latter. The second tier of analysis, presented in the current section, turns its attention to the question of 'why'. That is: *if* it is true that Luther is so intent upon securing the suffering of God in Christ, *why* is this commitment so important to him? Although it would be an overstatement to suggest that *all* who argue for some version of the divergence thesis think that Luther's rationale is entirely soteriological in nature, this section will demonstrate that many scholars do in fact point in this direction.⁸³

The seeds of this view are already embedded, it seems, in the claim articulated by Kjell Ove Nilsson that Luther's Christology is driven *predominantly* by matters of soteriological concern. Such a posture certainly implies that the suffering of the divine nature (which Luther is assumed by Nilsson to affirm) is somehow redemptively

⁸²A recent essay that lays considerable emphasis upon the 'communicative structure' of Luther's theology is Sibylle Rolf, "'Christum und nichts anders'", 150-169.

⁸³One reason for this trend is the fact that most scholars view Luther's Christology to be determined completely by soteriological concerns. Such a claim is often intended to differentiate Luther's theological style from medieval theology that is often characterized, by contrast, as highly speculative.

necessary.⁸⁴ Ian Kingston Siggins is more direct in his book *Martin Luther's Doctrine of Christ* when he suggests that Luther's soteriology actually *depends* upon a rejection of divine impassibility.⁸⁵ In a similar vein, Marc Lienhard implies that impassibility is basically incompatible with Luther's soteriological claim that Christ actually bears the sins of humanity.⁸⁶ Florian Schneider understands Luther's reformational Christology to be oriented towards his new doctrine of justification by faith. This includes, for him, an insistence that God meet human beings where they are, and thus share completely in the forsakenness of their situation.⁸⁷ Thus, while the central focus of these few authors lies primarily elsewhere, each endorses the notion that Luther's soterio-logic *requires* a mutual communicative exchange in which Christ's divine nature suffers.

The most explicit assertion of the association between Luther's alleged christological deviation and a soteriologically necessary denial of divine impassibility is

⁸⁴ For Nilsson's comments on the centrality of soteriology in these matters, see Kjell Ove Nilsson, *Simul*, 207; 227; 237; 243. A particularly clear statement appears on page 257: "Diese Kommunikation in Christus zwischen Person und Natur, Natur und Natur, vom Menschlichen zum Göttlichen und vom Göttlichen zum Menschlichen, ist für Luther der entscheidende 'Artikel'". The logic described above, though, does not emerge as forcefully in Nilsson as it does in later authors.

⁸⁵ Ian Kingston Siggins, *Martin Luther's Doctrine of Christ*, 241. Siggins is a unique case because he argues that the overall shape of Luther's thought points in the direction of divine passibility, but laments the fact that Luther himself seems not to have realized this. In this respect, Siggins is among the most severe examples of the 'new wine in old wine skins' interpretation, because he thinks Luther does not do away with the doctrine of divine impassibility in his discussion of the communication of attributes, but claims that he would *need* to do so in order for the more central emphases of his theology to function properly. In an ironic way then, Siggins reinforces the accuracy of this chapter's sequential arrangement, but disagrees implicitly with the interpretations of Luther's Christology that correspond with it. His solution is to 'fix' Luther in order to help him be more consistent with his own best ideas. See more on Siggins in the documentation of the third tier below.

⁸⁶ Marc Lienhard, *Martin Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, 138. In other words, this soteriological trope is considered to be intrinsically incompatible with the doctrine of impassibility. The strength of this assertion, though, is mitigated by the fact that the vast majority of the confessional Protestant tradition accepted this theory of the atonement and still maintained a classical doctrine of divine impassibility.

⁸⁷ Florian Schneider, *Christus Praedicatus et Creditus*, 191 "Die Überwindung der Sünde in Christus uns zugute muß zunächst die Sünde nochmals schrecklich groß machen, so groß, daß ein Riß durch Gott selbst geht, daß er sich selbst in einem sich gegen ihn selbst richtenden Willen gegenüber treten muß."

expressed in the work of Johann Anselm Steiger, and Dennis Ngien.⁸⁸ Steiger's essay, "Die communicatio idiomatum als Achse und Motor der Theologie Luthers", builds upon the work of Schwarz, Nilsson and Lienhard. He reiterates the prominent claim that Luther overturns the impassibilist 'veto' that casts its shadow across patristic and medieval treatments of the communication of attributes.⁸⁹ Whereas John of Damascus, for instance, limits his discussion of reciprocal attribution in order carefully to proscribe the suffering of Christ's divinity, things are "entirely different" [ganz anders] for Luther, who Steiger insists removes this limit and embraces a *fully* reciprocal exchange between natures.⁹⁰ Steiger traces the theological extension of this 'exchange theme' of reciprocal exchange in relation to a number of aspects of Luther's theology. The first and most important consequence of Luther's position is soteriological in nature. According to Steiger, Luther's christological adjustment is *geared towards* a soteriology of communicative exchange wherein humanity receives a share in *all* that belongs to divinity, and *vice versa*.⁹¹ A central ingredient of this exchange in Steiger's interpretation is the genuine sharing of God in the defects of human existence.⁹²

⁸⁸This association is also advanced by the Erlangen theologian, Werner Elert. See Volker Keding, "Wider das Apathieaxiom: Die theopaschitische Christologie des späten Elert und ihre Wirkungsgeschichte" in *Mit dem Menschen verhandeln über den Sachgehalt des Evangeliums: die Bedeutung der Theologie Werner Elerts für die Gegenwart*, eds. Rudolf Keller and Michael Roth (Erlangen: Martin-Luther-Verlag, 2004), 97.

⁸⁹For Steiger's citation of these authors, see Johann Anselm Steiger, "Die communicatio idiomatum als Achse und Motor der Theologie Luthers", 1 n. 1. For his insistence that Luther intensifies the *communicatio idiomatum* to include the suffering of the divine nature, see *ibid*, 3-5.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 3.

⁹¹"Dieses soteriologische Theologoumenon verdankt sich christologischer Reflexion; man könnte auch sagen: Luther hat die Christologie konsequent auf die Soteriologie angewandt, indem er beide Lehren synoptisch gelesen und die eine auf die andere angewandt hat." *Ibid*, 5-6.

⁹²*Ibid.*, 5-7.

Dennis Ngien agrees entirely with the claim that Luther moves beyond a traditional doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*, and embraces a relationship between natures that includes the suffering of the divine nature of Christ. The defense of this basic thesis is the main trajectory of his essay, “Chalcedonian Christology and Beyond: Luther’s Understanding of the *Communicatio Idiomatum*.”⁹³ The decidedly soteriological trajectory of Luther’s revolutionary position becomes clear in the third section of Ngien’s essay, entitled, “God’s Suffering and Soteriology”.⁹⁴ Here, Ngien mounts his argument largely on the basis of a section of Luther’s 1539 treatise “On the Councils and the Church” where the reformer states:

“Unless God is in the balance and throws his weight as a counterbalance, we shall sink to the bottom of the scale. ... If it is not true that God died for us, but only a man died, we are lost. But if God’s death and God dead lie in the opposite scale, then his side goes down and we go upward like a light or empty pan. Of course, he can also go up again and jump out of his pan. But he could not have sat in the pan unless he became a man like us, so that it could be said: God dead, God’s passion, God’s blood, God’s death. According to his nature God cannot die, but since God and man are united in one person it is correct to talk about God’s death when that man dies who is one thing or one person with God.”⁹⁵

Ngien does not address in his discussion here the important qualifier “according to his nature God cannot die” which would seem, *prima facie*, to complicate the blatantly passibilist interpretation he assigns to this passage, although he elsewhere addresses

⁹³Dennis Ngien, “Chalcedonian Christology and Beyond: Luther’s Understanding of the *Communicatio Idiomatum*” *Heythrop Journal* 45 (2004): 54-68. Ngien’s point of view is that Luther maintains the traditional position at many points in his life, but that there are a handful of texts in his corpus that unambiguously move beyond it.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 59-60.

⁹⁵This section is copied from *ibid.*, 59 where the author quotes *The Formula of Concord*’s rendering of WA 50, 590. This same quote occupies a central place in Steiger’s presentation. Johann Anselm Steiger, “Die *communicatio idiomatum* als Achse und Motor der Theologie Luthers”, 6-7.

disclaimers of this kind through an explanation of the concrete/ abstract distinction that echoes points of view already espoused in previous scholarship.⁹⁶

The directness of Ngien's appropriation of this text warrants verbatim documentation:

"In order to redeem human beings from the power of death, *God has to co-suffer and co-die in Christ*. That is why Luther makes use of his image of the scale, to illustrate that God can go down, can rise and jump out of his pan. God lets himself be overtaken by death in the suffering and dying of Jesus, and yet he remains the victor over death. The divine nature was present throughout the earthly life of Jesus, and was not untouched by the whole affair of the incarnation. With this it becomes clear how closely the two-nature Christology and soteriology are linked in Luther's thinking. *It is a theological axiom that Christ be affected by suffering even according to the divine nature, otherwise salvation through Christ's suffering is inconceivable to him.*"⁹⁷

Here we see that, for Ngien, Luther's alleged reconfiguration of Christology is a basic requirement of his soteriology. The theme of God's full and redemptive participation in the predicament of post-lapsarian humanity stipulates the capacity of divinity to suffer. This soterio-christological symmetry is an important binding thread that unites this chapter's sequential presentation of the divergence reception. Although there is some disagreement among the scholar's surveyed thus far concerning the extent to which Luther consistently realized this symmetry, the fundamental notion that the logic of his soteriology *requires* christological deviation remains more or less a constant.⁹⁸ Thus,

⁹⁶Dennis Ngien, "Chalcedonian Christology and Beyond", 62; 65. According to Ngien, and others already surveyed above, this distinction points to the fact that God only suffers in and through the incarnate unity with the human nature. *Outside* of the incarnation, or before it, divinity does not and cannot suffer. Thus, the emphasis in this explanation of the distinction rests upon a sequential or temporal analysis. When Luther says "God cannot suffer", this is taken to mean that divinity *by itself* (in eternity) does not suffer, but this statement is not thought to mitigate the subsequent reality that divinity *does suffer* in and through the incarnation of Christ. Chapter 2 of this dissertation will address the adequacy of this interpretation.

⁹⁷Ibid., 59. Emphasis mine.

⁹⁸A notable exception here is Theobald Beer who likewise argues for a christological divergence, but thinks the source of Luther's novelty lies not so much in a soteriology of divine solidarity, but in Luther's tendency to proliferate antithetical dualisms. As we have already explained, Beer is included here

viewed retrospectively, the sequential thrust of the divergence thesis' cumulative argument could be summarized in the following manner:

Luther's commitment to a soteriology of God's radical participation in the lowly estate of sinners requires as its internal presupposition the capacity of God's *nature* to suffer, or experience genuine vulnerability. This capacity is secured only insofar as the traditional proscriptions against divine suffering, which govern the traditional treatment of the *communicatio idiomatum*, are overcome. The radical account of union between divinity and humanity that emerges in Luther's counter-proposal, moreover, stands in diametrical tension with the nominalist notion of suppositional carrying (with its guiding axiom: *nulla proportio est finiti ad infinitum*), which not only accepts but actually *intensifies* the classical proscriptions whose pagan philosophical derivation obstructs the realization of Luther's soteriological trajectory. This conceptual framework must therefore likewise be jettisoned in favor of an unmitigated affirmation of *real* and *reciprocal* communion between God and man in the person of Christ.

It is this basic logical organization of Luther's theological commitments that has mediated the broad perception of his ongoing significance that this dissertation seeks to engage. A central implication of such an interpretive synthesis, as represented by the third 'tier' of our survey, is the conviction that Luther inaugurates a fundamentally new account of God's being in relation to the progress of salvation history. In the following documentation of this 'third tier', we will explore a number of instances in which the sequential progression so far traced is enlisted to reinforce this extension of Luther's theology.

because he reiterates an interpretation of Luther's Christology that comports in many particulars with those scholars whose work points more neatly along the trajectory of the divergence reception. The organization of this chapter is not intended to suggest that every point along the way *must* point in the direction of a historicized doctrine of God. It would be more accurate to say, more modestly, that the interpretations charted here *have* been appropriated in this way; and, in many cases, that this trajectory has often been cited as a major motivating factor for the alleged christological divergence defended by so many. Other appropriations of this 'logic' are to be found in a number of systematic uses of Luther over the last several decades. Most conspicuous here is the work of Jürgen Moltmann, but his understanding of Luther's soteriological significance is by no means an isolated phenomenon.

A Fundamentally New Doctrine of God

To this point, we have occupied ourselves with the documentation of several commonplace interpretations of Luther's theology as it pertains specifically to technical aspects of his Christology and their relation to his broader soteriological commitments. This discussion has therefore been confined primarily to synchronic or micro-diachronic assessments of Luther's thought; that is, analyses that fall within the chronological parameters either of a given set of discrete texts (I.E. his late christological disputations as in the case of Schwarz), or within the proscribed limits of Luther's theological development over the course of his life (I.E. the allegedly coherent contours of his soteriological vision in the wake of his first articulation of justification by faith alone). In this section, we reflect upon a prominent 'macro-diachronic' construal of Luther's significance in light of these interpretive building blocks. The advance to questions of the meta-narrative variety is encouraged by gestures in the direction of a retrospective evaluation of Luther's significance in light of modern concerns that show up in the concluding remarks of several scholars documented above. The pregnant trajectories of these vestigial 'gestures' have subsequently been taken up by contemporary theologians eager to plot the cartography of modern theological trends and thus specify their apparent precursory development. It must be clear in addressing this phenomenon, though, that such an enterprise departs from the task of 'Luther-interpretation' in the strict sense. Our concern, first and foremost, is to document the way in which the sequential interpretation

of Luther's Christology plotted above has been *used* in constructive efforts to mine the radiating implications of Luther's ostensible novelty.⁹⁹

Speaking rather generally, we may summarize at the outset that the theoretical extension of the divergence interpretation tends to include two central elements that together frame contemporary perceptions of Luther's ongoing significance. The first component asserts a decisive overthrow, on Luther's part, of the classical doctrine of God, with its putatively Greek *a priori* definition of divine attributes.¹⁰⁰ One correctly detects here a considerable overlap between the modern historiography of Luther's theology and the broader narrative of 'hellenization' that has been used as an explanatory device for making sense of early Christian doctrinal development. Situated by such a narrative, Luther emerges as an early *de-hellenizer*; an abject opponent of every attempt to define the being of God in the terms of classical theism.¹⁰¹

The second central element of the extension is positive in nature. It focuses upon the new doctrine of God, with which Luther supplants its philosophically corrupted

⁹⁹This documentation is necessary for at least two reasons. 1) The historical task is often (if not always) reciprocal in nature. Interpretations make way for narratives of significance, and narratives of significance often encourage retrospective interpretations of figures on the plane established by them. A full account of a reception, then, requires description of both cause (interpretation) and effect (significance) because the progression between these stages is seldom one-way. 2) For better or worse, the broader perceived significance of Luther's thought in relation to modern questions has served often as a framework for the interpretation of his thought. The particular conceptual extension examined in this section goes a long way in documenting the central claims responsible for recurrent assessments of Luther's fundamental theological contributions. All of this adds to the interpretive thicket that together constitutes the divergence reception as defined in this dissertation.

¹⁰⁰I am thinking here, primarily, of immutability, simplicity, impassibility and the like.

¹⁰¹The question of whether this characterization is fair to patristic or medieval modes of thought need not detain us here. For our purposes, the salient fact is that Luther has been interpreted frequently on the terrain of such a narrative. There is also some overlap here with Heidegger's influential critique of onto-theology, which is sometimes invoked by those concerned to develop theology beyond all metaphysics, and beyond the question of 'being' altogether. Heidegger, himself, paves the way for such a reception. See, for instance, Merold Westphal, *Overcoming Onto-Theology: Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 4

precursor. What is generally regarded as central to Luther's alternative account is its stark recognition of God's passionate involvement in history. It acknowledges that God, like us (though not perhaps in exactly the same way), is *conditioned* by the events of salvation history and does not remain unchanged by His association with them. The passibility of God is an emblematic outgrowth of this insight. The constructive pay-off for contemporary theology is an ostensibly more robust doctrine of divine immanence.

Premonitions of the 'immanence extension' may be detected in the seminal essay by Schwarz only on the basis of indirect inference. In his interpretation, Luther diverges from late medieval theology primarily because he adopts a christological first principle that forfeits all *a priori* conceptions of the divine being, a point of view that places Luther at odds with the nominalist penchant for beginning with a doctrine of divine-human incommensurability. In light of Schwarz's earlier comment that the nominalists faithfully redact the christological views of the early church, is it too much to conclude that he conceives of this shift as touching upon the most basic doctrinal assumptions of the early church? Does Schwarz understand classical Christian theism as a whole to be supervised by the very same *a priori* commitments that Luther would later overthrow? At the very least, we may observe that, for Schwarz, the central dividing line between Luther and the late medieval objects of his critique resides in the fact that, while the latter takes it's starting point from pagan philosophy, Luther begins with the actual union of God and man in Jesus Christ, and thinks outwards only on its basis. One must be careful here to not place words in Schwarz's mouth. Nevertheless, whether intentional or not, the reader is certainly left with the implication that Luther, for the first time in the history of dogmatic development, pulled back the Hellenistic veil that had long attenuated the

capacity of theological reflection to affirm fully the mystery of God's *real* union with humanity in Christ. Such an implication portends far-reaching adjustments on Luther's part to the traditional doctrine of God, adjustments that scholars writing in Schwarz's wake declare more transparently than he does.¹⁰²

One such scholar is Ian Kingston Siggins who argues that the central, abiding trajectory of Luther's thought carries theology beyond the static God of the philosophers and embraces a more dynamic understanding of God's being. This position characterizes Siggins' presentation of Luther's Christology, although, as we have noted, he thinks Luther's discussion of the *communicatio idiomatum* is diluted by traditional concepts that no longer fit well within his overall point of view. So, Siggins claims, although it is clear that Luther entirely rejects the doctrine of divine impassibility and affirms over against it the genuine suffering of God, his attempt to speak within the traditional christological categories inherited from his context leaves the awkward impression that he ascribes suffering only to the humanity, a point of view Siggins views as incoherent and probably Nestorian.¹⁰³ Siggins' explanation of this phenomenon makes it rather clear that he views this uncharacteristic regress (that is, Luther's denial of divine suffering in his technical explanation of the communication of idioms) as standing in awkward tension with the

¹⁰²Even Nilsson, who published his important book in the same year as Schwarz's essay, espouses a markedly starker appraisal of Luther's relation to the apparent Hellenism of the tradition's doctrine of God, although Nilsson, like several others, argues in favor of Luther's fundamental traditionalism in other respects. His ability to mount this 'traditionalist' argument depends upon an ancillary relation between an alleged center of patristic Christology, and the broader philosophical vocabulary through which this center was expressed. Such a strategy has been adopted by several other scholars who likewise seek to defend Luther's Chalcedonianism, though still embrace the main elements of the divergence interpretation.

¹⁰³For the former concession, see Ian Kingston Siggins, *Martin Luther's Doctrine of Christ*, 237. For the latter verdict, see page 128.

rest of Luther's theology, and so he laments the fact that Luther was not more consistent in his re-interpretation of the relation between divinity and humanity in Christ.¹⁰⁴

The fact that Luther speaks in terms of this traditional framework at all, is accidental to his intentions, an inadvertent byproduct of the time in which he lived. It is not in any way a central piece of his evangelical theology.¹⁰⁵ The explosive materials of Luther's theology lie, for Siggins, always somewhat muted in nucleic dormancy, never erupting to the point that the restrictive structures of static orthodoxy are set aside, as they would *need* to be for the reconfiguration they anticipate to achieve complete consistency. The relation of all this to Siggins' interpretation of Luther's reconfiguration of the doctrine of God is visible in a particularly impassioned paragraph that shows up towards the end of his magisterial study:

“If only Luther had rigorously pursued his own counsel into the realm of dogma! But remnants of the philosophers' God persist, despite his radical insistence that whatever rational apprehension of God we may possess, it is to be abandoned for the lively knowledge of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This should lead to a complete reworking of the truth enshrined in the sentence, ‘Christ maintained His Godhead unaltered when He became man.’ For it should mean that even what we know of God's unchangeability is determined by what we discover of it through faith in Christ. And this God is not the almighty incomprehensible First Cause of the schools, but a God whose mercy is from everlasting to everlasting. ‘Since that Day God speaks to us Himself through His Son and Holy Spirit. Now we hear a fatherly voice proclaiming sheer unfathomable, ineffable love and mercy, utterly nothing but blessing, nothing but goodness, sweetness, and love. *For that is what it means to be God.*’”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴So, Siggins comments: “In short even though Luther's presentation of the *communicatio idiomatum* is technically tenable, it creates an impression alien to his design. Fortunately, it is a minor incident in his biblical exegesis; and at most points Luther is content to confess the unity of the natures on the ground that the biblical account means what it says”. Ibid., 234.

¹⁰⁵“Luther's struggles with the formal categories of Christological theory arise from traditional familiarity, not from evangelical concern; and he is therefore unsuccessful in reinterpreting the old orthodoxy in terms of his new and living faith” Ibid., 239.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 240.

Siggins represents a minority voice in our survey. Like others within the afore-outlined sequence, he defends the overall interpretation that Luther rejects the doctrine of divine impassibility, and in so doing, liberates theology from its stifling philosophical overlord. However, he suggests (over against the vast majority of other scholars) that this is true not on the basis of, but *in spite of* Luther's treatment of the *communicatio idiomatum*. Siggins argues in this limited context that Luther inexplicably retains the traditional position that only the humanity of Christ suffers. Thus, there is in Luther something like an unrealized fissure between the genuinely evangelical contents of his theology, and the analytical categories through which he articulates his christological point of view, namely, the remnants of a philosophical tradition from which he implicitly departs.¹⁰⁷ Thus, for Siggins, Luther inaugurates a new doctrine of God on the basis of his redefinition of divinity and humanity, but Luther himself never worked out this new vantage point consistently *even* in the area of his own Christology. He cracks the foundation of classical theism, but leaves much of the edifice standing in place, ready to be toppled by later theologians who would take up the trajectories of his work more consistently.

Lienhard's reflection upon Luther's trans-historical significance in this area is much the same, although he is more specific about what exactly Luther contributes to modern theology than Siggins, and more optimistic about the extent to which Luther progressively overcomes the internal fissure between old and new within the

¹⁰⁷This internal fissure is illustrated by Siggins statement that Luther's soteriological emphases cannot survive if the doctrine of impassibility is retained. *Ibid.*, 241.

development of his thought.¹⁰⁸ Luther's Christology, as presented in the conclusion of Lienhard's book, is significant above all for its discovery of the historicity of divinity, a framework that overcomes the platonic doctrine of God that dominates the theological framework of Luther's predecessors and contemporaries.¹⁰⁹ In the modern period, theology has learned that 'persons' are not entities defined by their possession of a 'nature'. Instead, persons are their 'history', an insight Lienhard suggests Luther to have acknowledged.¹¹⁰ Thus, Luther emerges in Lienhard's closing evaluation as an important precursor (perhaps *the* hinge point) leading up to modern trends in the doctrine of God such as historicism and the affirmation of divine suffering.

Axel Schmidt likewise suggests Luther's Christology to point forward to decidedly modern frameworks in both theology and philosophy. For instance, Luther's account of the union of divinity and humanity in Christ, engineered in absence of a traditional metaphysical distinction between 'person' and 'nature', has as its only conceptual avenue a kind of proto-Hegelian dialectical union of opposites which creates an unresolved fissure running through the heart of Luther's theology. Schmidt's evaluation of Luther's attempt to locate the union of divinity and humanity upon the same plane of history (that is, without the help of the classical distinction between 'nature' and 'person') is obviously markedly different than those who see the historicization of God's being as a necessary step beyond theology's restrictively Hellenistic past. Nevertheless,

¹⁰⁸See, here, primarily, the section "Luther and the Modern Evolution of Christology" in Marc Lienhard, *Martin Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, 391f. On the 'fissure' in Luther's thought according to Lienhard, see above.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 391-2.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 393.

Schmidt shares the opinion that Luther's adjustments to Christology carry with them a trajectory that leads forward into German Idealism.¹¹¹

Johann Anselm Steiger argues that Luther's treatment of the *communicatio idiomatum* only continued the historicization of metaphysics already implicit in the two-nature doctrine of the early church. Luther is significant because he carried this process into a position of more radical internal consistency.¹¹² The reformer's transformation (N.B.: *not* eradication for Steiger) of the early Church's Greek metaphysics is thus interpreted with a nod towards Hegel, who would later take up Luther's theological mantle through his organization of history as the self-emptying of *Geist*. Steiger is unique in the sense that he asserts here no fundamental breach with the patristic or medieval doctrine of God, only the continuation of an uncompleted (to that point) process of metaphysical historicization.¹¹³ Luther's significance, though, is still located here in the terms of a 'transition' away from the relatively pre-historicized account of God's being in the patristic and medieval periods. Luther nudges dogmatic development onwards in the direction of modern conceptual frameworks (Hegel in particular) that reflect upon the inter-relatedness of God and man in Christ with a greater seriousness and internal consistency.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹See, for example, Axel Schmidt, *Die Christologie in Martin Luther's Disputationen*, 323 n. 14.

¹¹²Johann Anselm Steiger, "Die *communicatio idiomatum* als Achse und Motor der Theologie Luthers", 6. "Luther hat die metaphysische Ontologie der altkirchlichen Zwei-Naturen-Lehre soteriologisch gedacht und so die Metaphysik vergeschichtlicht und damit einen der Alten Kirche bereits begonnenen Vergeschichtlichungsprozeß der Metaphysik konsequent vorangetrieben."

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 27-8.

¹¹⁴A similar point of view that predates Steiger is an essay by Hünemann. Hünemann also thinks Luther points the way forward in the direction of Hegel, but carries out his reconfiguration of Christology only incompletely. See Peter Hünemann, "Geschichte der Christologie : Geschichte Jesu Christi mit den Menschen?" *Theologische Quartalschrift* 164 (1984): 102-120. Luther's Christology of reciprocal

Florian Schneider agrees. Because the unity of Christ's person is constituted by a linguistic concursus of contrary affections, Luther's view of the death of Christ is said to contain profound implications for the very life of God.¹¹⁵ In particular, Schneider's proposal highlights the fact that God *also* is qualified by the event of the incarnation and, in a certain way, actually *dependent* upon it for the final constitution of His being.¹¹⁶ "Through this linguistic activization and dynamization, Luther freed Christology from the efforts [Bemühungen] of ancient metaphysics."¹¹⁷ This conceptual liberation points the way forward to a more modern Christology with its openness to the historicity and passibility of God.¹¹⁸

The motif of an all-embracing break on Luther's part from a classical doctrine of God (as motivated by his Christology and soteriology) is perhaps nowhere stronger than in the recent work of Dennis Ngien. One finds inklings of the broader, synthetic narrative in the conclusion to his oft-cited essay, "Chalcedonian Christology and Beyond", composed in 2004.¹¹⁹ More developed, though, is the cumulative argument set out in the published version of Ngien's doctoral dissertation, *The Suffering of God according to*

exchange, it should be noted, is the logical link upon which this entire account of the reformer's perceived significance hangs.

¹¹⁵Florian Schneider, *Christus Praedicatus et Creditus*, 184.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 148. Schneider points here in a footnote to a comment by Eberhard Jüngel on the historicization of God's being.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, 354.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, 355.

¹¹⁹In the last section, for instance, Ngien argues for a line of continuity between Luther and modern theologians such as Moltmann and Jüngel. See Dennis Ngien, "Chalcedonian Christology and Beyond", 65.

*Martin Luther's 'theologia crucis'.*¹²⁰ In this book, Ngien assesses the extent to which the suffering of God in Christ is constitutive of God's very being in Luther's theology.¹²¹ Ngien suggests the doctrine of impassibility belongs entirely to an *a priori* definition of the divine being that flatly contradicts the biblical testimony.¹²² Luther, on the other hand, begins with Scripture and thus liberates theology from its "captivity to Hellenized or any *a priori* theological formulations."¹²³ This means, first and foremost, that God reveals himself to us in and through the sufferings of Christ; a suffering in which the divine *nature* clearly participates in Ngien's interpretation. As Ngien reflects upon this shared suffering of the divine nature in Christ, he articulates the implicit doctrine of God's being that Luther develops therein: "Luther conceives the theology of the Trinity in such a way that it includes the Incarnation and Passion of God in Christ, not as an addendum but as ontologically constitutive of God."¹²⁴

In these ways, the divergent interpretation of Luther's Christology and the soteriology it animates has informed broader theological receptions of Luther's significance, which identify him as an early departure *away from* the classically developed doctrine of God's being, and *towards* a historicized account. Such a reception depends and builds upon the various interpretive elements, which the preceding threefold survey has isolated. In order to create the conditions necessary for an *alternative*

¹²⁰Dennis Ngien, *The Suffering of God According to Martin Luther's 'Theologia Crucis'* (Vancouver: Regent College Pub, 2005).

¹²¹See a condensed version of Ngien's entire argument in *ibid.*, 1-2.

¹²²See his characterization of theology before Luther in chapters 1 and 2.

¹²³*Ibid.*, 41.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, 151-2. Ngien concedes that Luther never argues that the Father suffers. Only the sufferings of the divine Son are ontologically basic to the life of the Trinity in Ngien's view.

reception, then, it is necessary to consider in subsequent chapters whether the divergence thesis represents a historically legitimate appraisal of Luther's ideas.

An Agenda for Subsequent Examination

Based upon the definition and documentation of the divergence thesis in the preceding sections, we may turn now to the task of isolating the essential questions with which subsequent chapters of this dissertation will be occupied. These questions identify the fundamental issues upon which the verification or refutation of the divergence reception stands or falls.

Does Luther reject the late medieval nominalist doctrine of suppositional carrying and replace it with a new mechanism for describing the union of natures in Christ?

It is crucial that the reader notice here that the question is *not* whether Luther differs from late medieval thinkers such as Ockham, D'Ailly and Biel *in any respect*, for surely he is no mere puppet of their views! Instead, it asks whether there exists adequate evidence to postulate a rejection on his part of the doctrine of suppositional carrying.¹²⁵

Assessing this question must take into account the fact that suppositional carrying is not a monolithically determinate theory of christological explanation, but remains open to

¹²⁵This question need not directly engage the question of whether or not the rather critical presentation of Ockhamist Christology found in Schwarz is entirely correct, nor whether his pessimistic evaluation of the subsequent extrinsic relation between human nature and divine person represents an accurate depiction of late medieval thought. For a trenchant criticism of Schwarz along these lines, see Graham White, *Luther as Nominalist: A Study of the Logical Methods Used in Martin Luther's Disputations in the Light of Their Medieval Background* (Helsinki, Finland: Luther-Agricola-Society, 1994), 271-80. There exists considerable diversity within medieval scholasticism concerning the range of broader christological opinion with which the theory of suppositional carrying is paired. Schwarz comes close to acknowledging this internal variety in at least one place in his essay. Ibid, 300. "Man kann die Intention der skotistisch-ockhamistischen Christologie anti-eutychianisch nennen und kann darin ein berechtigtes Bestreben erblicken, die in der Hochscholastik festgelegte Position der Subsistens-Theorie mit ihrem anti-nestorianischen Zug nach der Gegenseite hin abzusichern." Schwarz may intend by this statement strongly to differentiate a subsistence theory of the hypostatic union from later reflection upon Christ in terms of 'suppositional carrying'. Whether such a bifurcation is appropriate is a question we will explore in chapter 2.

varieties of expression.¹²⁶ In order to determine, then, whether Luther moves beyond the parameters of late medieval Christology, we will first need to ascertain what are the essential features of ‘suppositional carrying’, which characterize the theory in its broadest conceptual outline. Based upon this broad definition, the investigation will then stand in a position to ascertain the extent of Luther’s allegiance to late medieval conceptualities. To do this, we will need to evaluate not only the ‘negative evidence’ Schwarz and others furnish to establish Luther’s divergence from late medieval Christology, but *also* ‘positive counter-evidence’ in Luther’s writing that seems to suggest an ongoing acquiescence on his part to the theory of ‘suppositional carrying’.¹²⁷

Does Luther’s treatment of the *communicatio idiomatum* apply ‘suffering’ to the divine nature of Christ?

This second question enjoys a higher degree of simplicity than the first. Its adjudication requires an appraisal of Luther’s treatment of the communication of idioms, especially in the works that flow from his pen in the last decade and a half of his life. This focus upon Luther’s later theological output is a function of the fact that most interpreters documented in our survey acknowledge Luther to articulate some version of the traditional position on the communication of attributes during the early years of his

¹²⁶That is to say, while the theory does stipulate *some things*, there are many subsidiary questions that it leaves unaddressed; questions over which adherents of the theory in general can and do disagree.

¹²⁷ This will involve, for example, appraising the extent to which Luther’s Christology retains a few characteristic analytical entailments of the theory itself. Examples of these entailments include: 1) an asymmetrical treatment of the relation between the person of Christ and the divine nature on the one hand, and the human nature on the other; 2) a use of ‘supposit logic’ for specifying and adjudicating the truth-value of christological statements; 3) a denial that the person of Christ is a ‘composite’; and 4) a strategy of establishing the continuity of subjectivity between the eternal Logos and the incarnate Christ that depends upon a non-composite understanding of the person.

theological output.¹²⁸ Because this interpretation implicitly grants the fact that Luther's earlier position still proscribes the suffering of the divine nature, the majority of our attention will focus upon those texts in which most scholars suggest there to be an unambiguous departure. The examination of this question will also be informed by a survey of late medieval predication theory, which will help to measure the relative extent of Luther's semantic novelty, for instance, when he insists upon the phrase that 'God suffers and dies'.

Does Luther's soteriology *depend* upon the divine nature of Christ suffering along with the humanity?

To ask whether a particular christological affirmation is *required* by Luther's soteriological commitments is to invite analysis of a more synthetic nature, and requires some apprehension of Luther's broad theological vision as a whole. The potential interpretive hazards that attend such a generalized form of inquiry are legion. In order to mitigate the risk of unchecked generalization, the initial probative discussion set forth in chapter four will confine itself primarily to the task of adjudicating the textual merits of the view that Luther's soteriology *requires* the suffering of the divine nature. It will do so by examining carefully each of the central texts adduced by proponents of the divergence thesis as evidence that divine passibility is a central entailment of Luther's soteriology. As a supplementary exercise, chapter four will also provide a constructive reinterpretation of the soterio-logic embedded within these texts, and others that reflect upon the nature and purpose of God's involvement in the sufferings of Jesus.

The third tier of the divergence thesis rests upon the historical legitimacy of tiers one and two, and thus stands or topples entirely on their basis. Because of this, the

¹²⁸Exceptions to this trend include the work of Erich Vogelsang and Florian Schneider.

present study will not labor the reader with any discrete discussion of an additional diagnostic question designed to secure the validity or invalidity of Luther's alleged reconfiguration of the doctrine of God. If the preliminary assertions of the divergence thesis are refuted successfully, it will simply be assumed that the 'historicizing' reception of Luther's ideas is exegetically misguided. The final chapters will be occupied instead with the task of re-imagining a contemporary appropriation of Luther's Christology no longer based upon the premise of seminal divergence.

Conclusion: The Thesis Re-visited

It is now possible to restate the central thesis of this dissertation with greater specificity. The subsequent chapters will argue in favor of four, implication-laden claims:

- 1) Luther's writings nowhere evince a fundamental rejection of the late medieval theory of suppositional carrying. On the contrary, a careful study of pertinent texts demonstrates an abiding adherence to this explanatory model.
- 2) Luther's doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* clearly and intentionally retains the doctrine of divine impassibility and nowhere endorses a mutual sharing of attributes *between natures*.
- 3) Luther's soteriological vision, far from requiring the affirmation of divine passibility, depends, in fact, upon its rejection. The fourth claim represents a cumulative judgment.
- 4) The reception of Luther's theology, which locates a major aspect of his contemporary significance in the perception of a fundamental re-direction of the doctrine of God, is misleading—at least insofar as it claims a divergence interpretation of Luther's Christology as its underlying historical warrant. It will be the task of subsequent chapters to substantiate the aforementioned claims, and explore a few of their most important implications for a renovated appropriation of Luther's Christology.

DETRACTOR OR DEBTOR?: LUTHER ON THE LATE MEDIEVAL METAPHYSICS OF THE INCARNATION

The ‘divergence reception’ of Luther’s doctrine of Christ chronicled in the previous chapter has at its foundation the postulation of a two-fold doctrinal deviation in Luther’s christological discourse away from the theological framework of the late medieval tradition. This deviation is fundamental to all subsequent tiers of the reception, because it represents for it the conceptual point at which the fabric of an antiquated metaphysics first begins to tear, thus giving way to a radically different alternative. Luther’s ‘new’ Christology could accordingly be likened to a small stone cast upon the placid waters of the medieval theological system, the effect of whose initial impact radiates steadily outwards, reordering the very nature of theology itself. The implication of all this, is that the construal of Luther’s ‘technical’ Christology scrutinized in the next two chapters stands at the very center of the ‘divergence reading’ as a whole. It represents, in a very real sense, the reception’s *sine qua non*, the evidentiary basis upon which it either stands or falls. What follows will seek to refute the textual interpretation requisite to this construal’s legitimacy, and thus, in effect, destabilize the foundation upon which the subsequent reception is built.

Because the first ‘tier’ of alleged divergence is essentially two-fold, its analysis in this study is divided correspondingly into two major chapters. The first chapter asks whether it is true that Luther’s writings exhibit a clear rejection of ‘suppositional carrying’ as an interpretive device for making sense of the hypostatic union. In the second chapter, the focus shifts to Luther’s treatment of the *communicatio idiomatum*. It attempts to ascertain whether Luther indeed moves beyond a traditional commitment to

divine impassibility, and embraces the suffering of Christ's divine nature. Both chapters ultimately argue in favor of a negative response to each of these questions, and suggest as a positive alternative that Luther remains very much within the parameters of late medieval discourse, at least so far as the two isolated issues are concerned. Luther does not reconfigure late medieval Christology in the way that has so often been suggested, and does not claim that the divine *nature* suffers in and through its hypostatic union with the humanity of Christ.

The Issue of Suppositional Carrying

Lying at the evidentiary foundations of the divergence thesis is an interpretation of Luther's Christology that pits him decisively *over against* late medieval conceptions of the hypostatic union. In particular, Luther is supposed to reject the scholastic view that the unity of humanity and divinity may be understood in the descriptive terms of 'alien suppositional carrying'. For those interpreters committed to the trajectory of reception outlined in the previous chapter, the basic rationale that animates Luther's departure from this 'descriptive mechanism' is his unwillingness to accept the extrinsic relationship that such an understanding appears to create between God and man in Christ.¹ In order to address the veracity of this claim, the present chapter includes two major sub-sections. The first reflects upon the medieval backdrop over against which Luther's views are

¹We have also noted a few interpreters who suggest a dualism of sorts to animate Luther's rejection of this christological theory. These authors are important insofar as they provide evidence in favor of divergence that we shall have to evaluate. However, the trajectory of their analysis differs from the reception that is the focus of this dissertation. Whether their 'quasi-dualist' account of Luther's theology is adequate is a question for another publication. All we may say in terms of evaluation here is that this construal hinges also, at least in part, upon the legitimacy of Luther's rejection of suppositional carrying. Thus, although what follows will not seek directly to draw this conclusion, the argument in favor of Luther's retention of this doctrine presents significant obstacles for the validity of the 'dualist' reading of Luther as well.

widely deemed novel. The second will evaluate the textual basis upon which the comparative ‘novelty’ of his own position has been alleged.

*The Putative ‘Whence’ of Christological Divergence:
Luther and His Late Medieval Context*

It goes without saying that an accurate appraisal of Luther’s relation to the medieval doctrine of suppositional carrying requires some prior delineation of the medieval doctrine itself. The same is naturally true of the next chapter’s focus upon the *communicatio idiomatum*. In light of this methodological prerequisite, the present subsection will attempt to furnish a historical baseline against which the alleged conceptual divergence of Luther from his immediate context may objectively be adjudicated. With the exception of Schwarz whose criticism of nominalist treatments of the hypostatic union rests upon a fairly extensive interaction with scholastic writings, the majority of characterizations of late medieval Christology within the divergence interpretation are content simply to define it through the employment of pejorative monikers such as ‘Nestorian’, ‘static’, ‘abstract’, or ‘speculative’.² The problem with this mode of depiction resides in the fact that the characterizations listed here all manifest a combination of both description *and evaluation* on the part of their authors. As such, they risk, in the case of the divergence thesis, presuming the very point they wish to prove;

²See for instance Marc Lienhard, *Luther, Witness to Jesus Christ: Stages and Themes of the Reformer's Christology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1982), 30; 387-9; Ulrich Asendorf, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers nach seinen Predigten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 197; Vidar L. Haanes, "Christological Themes in Luther's Theology" *Studia Theologica* 61 (2007): 23-9; Florian Schneider, *Christus praedicatus et creditus: die reformatorische Christologie Luthers in den "Operationes in Psalmos" (1519-1521), dargestellt mit beständigem Bezug zu seiner Frühzeitchristologie* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2004), 102-3; Athina Lexutt, "Christologie als Soteriologie: ein Blick in die späten Disputationen Martin Luthers," in *Relationen* (Münster: LIT, 2000), 205-7. To some extent, these authors document the importance of Schwarz’s essay not only for creating broad perceptions about Luther’s christological commitments, but also for establishing a lens through which medieval Christology is interpreted.

namely, that late medieval Christology is deeply problematic (for whatever reason), and that Luther does well to deviate from it.³

Schwarz's essay is obviously more nuanced in its approach, but its presentation of late medieval Christology is also somewhat idiosyncratic when compared with pertinent scholarship of recent vintage, and the evaluative characterization of this period that flows from his analysis is inordinately derogatory as a result.⁴ This fact commends prior specification of the contents of medieval Christology in general, and the doctrine of suppositional carrying in particular. This specification, carried out under the supervision of mainstream medievalist scholarship, will provide the plumb-line over against which to measure the nature of Luther's relationship to late medieval Christology in subsequent sections of the chapter. Space will obviously preclude a comprehensive introduction to the formative characteristics of late medieval Christology. For the sake of much-needed focus, then, this survey will concentrate its attention upon the intent and intrinsic commitments that attend a doctrine of 'suppositional carrying' as an explanatory model for making sense of the hypostatic union.⁵

³For a nuanced argument against the verdict that Ockham's philosophical commitments preclude his affirmation of Chalcedonian Christology, see Marilyn McCord Adams, "Relations, Inherence, and Subsistence; or, Was Ockham a Nestorian in Christology" *Nous* 16 (1982): 62-75. For an examination of how this pejorative pattern of examination shapes the divergence thesis, see the discussion in chapter 5.

⁴For a devastating argument to this effect, see the interaction with Schwarz in Graham White, *Luther as Nominalist: A Study of the Logical Methods Used in Martin Luther's Disputations in the Light of Their Medieval Background*. Helsinki, Finland: Luther-Agricola-Society, 1994), 271-80. I will also document several problematic aspects of Schwarz's analysis in light of the forthcoming survey of medieval Christology below.

⁵This survey will also focus primarily upon those aspects of this 'intent' that a divergence interpretation would assume Luther to reject. Obviously, space precludes a comprehensive treatment of suppositional carrying in all its doctrinal particularity and complexity. The second part of this chapter will also consult the late medieval predication theory through which this understanding of union was carried to linguistic expression especially through extensive reflection upon the *communicatio idiomatum*.

At the outset of this survey, we will do well to admit the fact that referring to the ‘late medieval’ or ‘nominalist’ theory of suppositional carrying is misleading insofar as such qualifications are taken to imply that the notion of Christ’s human nature being carried by an alien *suppositum* (the divine Person) is peculiar *only* to the theologians of the late medieval period. To be sure, nominalist Christology (which is also by no means homogeneous) makes ample use of this theory as the basis for reflection upon the hypostatic union. The doctrine itself, however, is much older, and is espoused by a far broader number of medieval theologians than the designation ‘late medieval’ or ‘nominalist’ can accommodate.⁶ The concept of alien suppositional carrying as a mode of christological analysis is the result of a gradual process in which the philosophical vocabulary of antiquity was calibrated in order to express and specify an orthodox doctrine of Christ. Although the appropriation of Chalcedon in the West is complex and circuitous, we may, for the purposes of this survey, condense the contents of orthodox

⁶Because of this fact, we may dissociate ourselves from the closely related question of whether Schwarz’s particularly severe presentation of the Ockhamist *reception* of this theory is accurate. This is because the endorsement of ‘suppositional carrying’ is paired, in the history of medieval theology, with any number of variant attempts subsequently to specify the sort of relation that emerges between the divine Person and human nature in the incarnation. Thus, even if we were to grant: 1) that Schwarz’s radically extrinsic interpretation of Ockhamist Christology is accurate; and 2) that Luther finds such a view offensive; we would still, on that account, not be justified in concluding that Luther obviously rejects the doctrine of ‘suppositional carrying’ altogether, for the affirmation of the theory itself is broader than its particular appropriation in late medieval nominalism. This is not, however, *in any way* to concede the accuracy of Schwarz’s interpretation of the Ockhamists. What I am trying to demonstrate here is that the underlying organization of Schwarz’s argument in favor of his allegation that Luther rejects suppositional carrying constitutes a *non sequitur*, and that this fact has implications for the extent to which we must engage it on its own terms. The overall plausibility of his essay rests upon the following elements: 1) A radically extrinsic interpretation of Ockhamist Christology; and 2) an identification of this extrinsicism with suppositional carrying as such. Since Luther lays emphasis on the real *union* of divinity and humanity and criticizes doctrines of the incarnation that artificially ‘externalize’ this relationship (that is, he rejects element 1), Schwarz’s essay is able to argue plausibly that he also rejects suppositional carrying (on the basis of the identification expressed in element 2). Although I think a good case can be made that Schwarz caricatures the Christology of late medieval nominalism (thus questioning the validity of element 1), the limits of space lead me to point out, more straightforwardly, that the identification of Ockhamist Christology (however extrinsic it may be) with suppositional carrying is false because many medieval theologians who were not Ockhamists assumed it to be true. This alone is sufficient to mitigate the major traction of Schwarz’s argument. Again, for a criticism of element 1, that is, Schwarz’s interpretation of Ockhamist Christology, see the afore-referenced section of Graham White, *Luther as Nominalist*.

Christology through use of its determinate, conciliar vocabulary.⁷ The Chalcedonian definition asserts Christ to be both fully divine and fully human; and yet, despite this duality of natures, Christ is understood to exist always as only *one single* person (*hypostasis*) in whom these natures exist together inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, and inseparably.⁸

The attempt to articulate and expound this doctrine in the prevailing philosophical vocabulary of the mid to late medieval period required of its practitioners an assortment of fairly complex, conceptual adjustments, because a *strictly* Aristotelian articulation of the hypostatic union would terminate necessarily either in blatant contradiction (descriptive nonsense) or rank heresy (Nestorianism).⁹ A brief survey of a few pertinent aspects of Aristotelian philosophy will illustrate why these undesired theological results

⁷The reception of Chalcedon in the West was obstructed by inadequate historical and textual information during the medieval period. This inadequacy seems to have been largely mitigated by the 13th century, although Luther's knowledge of Chalcedon was deepened significantly by publications addressing it during his own life time. For a discussion of the sources upon which Luther relied, especially in his 1539 treatise "On the Councils and the Church", see Dorothea Vorländer, *Deus incarnatus: die Zweinaturenchristologie Luthers bis 1521*, Untersuchungen zur Kirchengeschichte, Bd. 9 (Witten: Luther-Verlag, 1974), 34. See also Mark Edwards, *Luther's Last Battles: Politics and Polemics, 1531-46* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), 93-6, especially n. 94. I am grateful to Gregorio Montejo for alerting me to the historical problems associated with speaking of the 'reception' of Chalcedon in the medieval West without recognition of the circuitry involved in its transmission. I am using Chalcedon as a baseline for orthodox Christology, in part, because this same approach is adopted by Marilyn McCord Adams and Allen Bäck in their work on medieval doctrines of Christ.

⁸For a helpful treatment of the major christological controversies leading up to Chalcedon, see John Anthony McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: The Christological Controversy: Its History, Theology, and Texts* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994).

⁹This is not to imply that medieval theologians sought intentionally to 'Aristotelianize' theological discourse, or that their work is rightly understood in this light. It would be more accurate simply to acknowledge that their reflections upon traditional dogma took place within a definite philosophical context that, in the mid- to late-medieval period anyways, was heavily influenced by Aristotle, and, as a result, their treatment of Christology in particular reflects a decisively Aristotelian vocabulary. The main point of this survey, though, is not how *Aristotelian* the medieval theologians are, but how extensively they calibrate and modify Aristotle's philosophy in order to express a traditional doctrine of the hypostatic union. For a succinct summary of the theological dilemma that emerges from Aristotle's views, see Marilyn McCord Adams, "What's Metaphysically Special about Supposits? Some Medieval Variations on Aristotelian Substance". *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 79 (2005): 30.

are practically predetermined unless Aristotle is seriously ‘adjusted’ for christological use.

Aristotle’s analysis of individual existents proceeds on the basis of a fundamental distinction between ‘primary substances’ and ‘secondary substances’. A ‘primary substance’ refers to an individuated existent as such, whereas a ‘secondary substance’ designates this existent’s ‘whatness’. It specifies what *kind* of thing this primary substance *is*. So, in the case of Socrates, a ‘secondary substance’ analysis specifies the fact that Socrates is ‘human’ (so, secondary substance = ‘humanity’), but the ‘primary substance’ refers to the individual person of Socrates himself. This same fundamental distinction is reflected in the alternative terminology often invoked in medieval discourse of *supposita* and *naturae*. Within this vocabulary, a *suppositum* refers to the primary substance, which ‘carries’ (*suppono*) the generic secondary substance into individuated existence; whereas a *nature* denotes the secondary substance, which is thus ‘carried’.¹⁰

Salient for the purposes of the present survey is the fact that, for Aristotle, there is always a one to one ratio between primary and secondary substances within an individual existent. The man Socrates’ secondary substance (his humanity) reflects essentially *what* he is (human). The notion that an individual person (like Christ) could possess *two* natures, or secondary substances, would entail, for Aristotle, one of two logical consequences. On the one hand, insofar as Christ is truly just *one* primary substance or *suppositum* (as Chalcedon demands), the assertion of Christ simultaneously possessing two natures (or ‘secondary substances’) collapses into sheer contradiction. No primary

¹⁰On this distinction, see Marilyn McCord Adams, “What’s Metaphysically Special about Supposits? Some Medieval Variations on Aristotelian Substance”. 16. See also Marilyn McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology*, Current Issues in Theology (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 110-14.

substance can be, as to its essence, two ‘kinds’ of things simultaneously. ‘Beulah the cow’ simply *cannot* be, at the same time and in exactly the same way, ‘Beulah the donkey’. For Aristotle, the notion of a two-natured suppositum would be tantamount to the self-contradictory idea of a ‘square-circle’. In a strictly Aristotelian environment, the existence of two secondary substances simply *entails* two corresponding primary substances.

Under the constraints of this logical impasse, one could seek, then, to resolve the contradiction by embracing a second purely Aristotelian alternative and concede that Christ is actually somehow *two* persons or *two* supposits that exist beside one another, one divine and the other human. This option avoids contradiction to be sure, but resolves the problem (from the perspective of Chalcedonian orthodoxy anyways) in a decidedly heretical direction. Orthodoxy demands that Christ be *one* person. Otherwise one invites a Nestorian bifurcation of Christ into two acting subjects. Since the two ‘strictly Aristotelian’ options terminate in either contradiction (that is, simply asserting nonsense) or heresy (allowing the philosophical vocabulary to corrupt Christian content), it is understandable that the medieval theologians deemed this philosophical framework to require a bit of creative tweaking in order for it to comport with their theological intentions.¹¹

According to Marilyn McCord Adams, it is Boethius (c. 480-525) who first attempts to apply the conceptual vocabulary of Aristotle’s *Categories* beyond the realm of earthly existents, to which Aristotle thought their viability restricted. Boethius extends

¹¹The extent and depth of this conceptual tweaking goes beyond what we are able to detail here. For a more nuanced presentation, see Marilyn McCord Adams, “What’s Metaphysically Special about Supposits?”, 15-52. See also Marilyn McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, 124.

Aristotle's descriptive grammar to characterize objects of *theological* reflection as well.¹² In order to do this, he suggests that Christian theology should conceptualize the union of God and man in Christ as a *unique* event in which the divine *suppositum* (that is, the 2nd person of the Trinity) assumes to itself not a self-individuated human person, but an otherwise intact human nature. That is, while Boethius may not deny the *general* viability of Aristotle's prescriptive one-to-one ratio between primary and secondary substances, the incarnation represents for him at least one instance in which this otherwise predictable pattern is strangely interrupted. In the hypostatic union, the one primary substance/ supposit of the 2nd person of the Trinity 'carries' into discrete expression not only its *own* nature, but also the human nature of Christ, which would ordinarily be its own *suppositum*, but in this case depends upon the divine Word in a relation of 'alien suppositional carrying'.¹³ Boethius evidently views the Aristotelian framework as furnishing a useful vocabulary for articulating of the Christian confession that God became man in Christ within Chalcedonian parameters.¹⁴

¹² Boethius was a late patristic theologian whose work would later be highly influential for the scholastic theologians of the medieval West. My presentation of Boethius' significance depends here upon Marilyn McCord Adams, "What's Metaphysically Special about Supposits?", 16; 22-5.

¹³ Speaking more accurately, the divine nature *is its own suppositum*. The distinction between primary and secondary substance as invoked here is not meant to imply the presumption of a generic category of 'God-ness' in which the three persons of the Trinity share equally. To do so would suggest a 'quaternity' and the theologians of both the patristic and medieval periods avoided such a connotation on both philosophical and theological grounds. As we have already mentioned, this way of describing the incarnation is actually impossible within a consistently Aristotelian framework. See Marilyn McCord Adams, "What's Metaphysically Special about Supposits?", 32-3. See also Marilyn McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, 111. "Unmodified Aristotelian essentialism raises a problem for how a substance individual could have two substance-natures *essentially*, in such a way that it could not exist without them. Unmodified Aristotelian essentialism rests here, because it doesn't envision any other way for a substance individual to have or be characterized by a substance-kind."

¹⁴ See Marilyn McCord Adams' detailed presentation of how Scotus and Ockham explore this 'exception' in her afore-referenced essay "What's Metaphysically Special about Supposits?". As Adams comments in an earlier essay, these complexities sprout from the distinction medieval explanations of the incarnation create between "being an individual created substance nature and being a suppositum of such a nature". Marilyn McCord Adams, "The Metaphysics of the Incarnation in some Fourteenth-Century

This quasi-Aristotelian motif would later become a mainstay in medieval reflection upon the person of Christ, at least in the work of the scholastic theologians pertinent to the question pursued in the present study. Despite whatever other points of difference distinguish their work from one another, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Scotus, Ockham, D'Ailly, and Biel all share as a function of their common discursive environment an attempt to engage christological questions through the heuristic philosophical mechanism of alien suppositional carrying. Speaking in a general sense, the broad intent of this mechanism, so far as the medievals were concerned anyways, was to express the doctrine of the incarnation in a way that fulfills four main criteria: 1) a genuine union of two *fully intact* natures (divine and human); 2) within a single, undivided person; 3) without the entailment of blatant contradiction; and 4) without the entailment of any 'ontological conditioning' or 'fundamental change' to the divine nature.¹⁵ So far as the task of defining the *medieval* doctrine of the suppositional union is concerned, then, we can suggest the following as a preliminary working designation:

The medieval account of the hypostatic union as 'suppositional carrying' reflects the attempt to articulate a Chalcedonian understanding of Christ (that is, two complete natures united in but one person) through a tailored application of Aristotelian philosophical vocabulary in which the self-suppositing divine nature is said to assume an intact human nature, which would, under normal circumstances exist on the basis of its own individuating self-supposition; but in this unique case, is sustained instead by the *divine* suppositum in a relationship of *alien suppositional carrying*. The medieval articulation of this phenomenon is supervised, moreover, by a consistent desire to avoid:

Franciscans", in *Essays Honoring Allan B. Wolter*, eds. Kenny Kretzmann and Pinborg (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: Franciscan Institute, 1985), 26.

¹⁵ On the use of qualification in medieval Christology as a means of bypassing contradiction, see Allan T. Bäck, "Aquinas on the Incarnation," *New Scholasticism* 56 (1982): 127-45; and Allan T. Bäck, "Scotus on the Consistency of the Incarnation and the Trinity," *Vivarium* 36 (1998): 83-107. For a discussion of the fourth desideratum, see Marilyn McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, 125-7.

1) the proliferation of blatant contradiction; and 2) the suggestion that the divine nature (or divine person) incurs ontological change as the result of this unique relationship.¹⁶

The conceptual difficulty associated with maintaining each of the four desiderata contained in this heuristic definition at the same time accounts, to some extent, for the overwhelming complexity of christological discussion in the medieval period.¹⁷

Although Reinhard Schwarz describes with fair accuracy the central conceptual mechanics of ‘suppositional carrying’, he flattens the diversity of medieval opinion, which fits within this descriptive model. For instance, he creates the mistaken impression that the theory *as such* entails a highly specific and, in his estimation, rather thin account of the subsequent relation that emerges in it between humanity and divinity in general, and of the divine person to the human nature in particular.¹⁸ Rhetorically, Schwarz’s over-determinate rendering of suppositional carrying encourages his readers to agree that

¹⁶ I emphasize the qualifier *medieval* here, because both Richard Cross and Marilyn McCord Adams defend a doctrine of suppositional carrying for use in modern theology, but suggest it be paired with a doctrine of God no longer bound to the presupposition of divine impassibility. Thus, my claim here (and in the first chapter) is not that it is *impossible* to affirm suppositional carrying and not retain a doctrine of divine impassibility. My argument is based upon the fact that Schwarz and others interpret Luther’s alleged rejection of divine impassibility to require an overthrow of the medieval doctrine of the hypostatic union. In response, I mean simply to prove that: 1) he does not reject suppositional carrying; and that 2) his articulation of it, unlike Cross and Adams, retains the traditional doctrine of divine impassibility that, in the medieval period, supervised the modalities of its expression. The argument, then, is intentionally cumulative. Merely disproving Luther’s rejection of suppositional carrying would not entail his retention of divine impassibility—a point both Cross and Adams’ constructive work demonstrates. This is not intended to function as a *comprehensive* definition of the theory itself, but to establish its broadest boundaries. Our definition is considerably less determinate than the one presumed by Schwarz, but his interpretation of Luther’s Christology would still place Luther at odds with our broader characterization (especially with respect to the 4th criterion). Whether or not this interpretation is accurate will be the question pursued in a subsequent section of this chapter.

¹⁷ My definition is ‘heuristic’ because I am ‘abstracting’ from standard secondary literature the main values that their description of medieval Christology reflects. By culling these values into a centralized definition, it is hoped that we will gain a reliable point of departure for the subsequent task of evaluating the extent of Luther’s adherence to the medieval view. This summary is not intended *in any way* to supplant the historical descriptions upon which it is entirely dependent. Readers interested in context-specific manifestations of medieval Christology on a particular level should consult the works consulted in this section’s footnotes.

¹⁸ See Reinhard Schwarz, “Gott ist Mensch”, 293-8.

Luther *obviously* rejects such a view on account of his characteristic and emphatic affirmation of a *real* union between God and man in Christ; an affirmation that Schwarz's idiosyncratic portrayal of late medieval Christology practically prohibits.¹⁹ In the absence of this narrowly pejorative presentation of the doctrine of suppositional carrying, however, the rhetorical strength of Schwarz's implicit, trajectory-laden contrast is abated. Space is thus created for a renovated appraisal of the relation between Luther and his late medieval teachers. The following section will pursue this re-appraisal, and seek to evaluate whether or not Luther actually departs from suppositional carrying as he is so often claimed to do. This question will be adjudicated not only on the basis of explicit statements about the theory from his writings, but also by discerning the extent to which Luther honors the directive criteria identified above as representative of generic 'medieval intent.'²⁰

Luther's Rejection of Suppositional Carrying: Fact or Fiction?

This section seeks, on the basis of the previous characterization of suppositional carrying, to examine the extent to which Luther continues to operate within its main theological parameters. Methodologically, the organization of this examination will depend upon two important factors. In the first place, it recognizes the fairly obvious fact that Luther never composed a treatise whose sustained focus is the hypostatic union *as*

¹⁹Over-determinate both in the sense that suppositional carrying is be treated as a uniquely Ockhamist phenomenon *and* in the rather narrow and pessimistic assessment of the kind of union between humanity and divinity such a model is said to allow; namely, one of only sheer juxtaposition.

²⁰Again, I am not claiming here that the four-fold definition provided above furnishes a comprehensive summation of medieval christological intent. Instead, it seeks to articulate the broad commitments to which medieval theologians understood themselves responsible, and emphasizes especially those aspects of these commitments which divergence interpreters would ordinary assume Luther to object.

such.²¹ This does not reflect any lack of interest on Luther's part in christological questions. It also does not mean that the vocabulary and concepts of late medieval Christology are altogether absent from Luther's theological vernacular. It does *mean*, however, that sorting through his views on the metaphysics of the incarnation could require an eclectic accumulation of otherwise unconnected textual fragments from his corpus in order to 'stitch together' a determinate rendering of his ideas. Thankfully, the second methodologically-directing factor removes the need for this historically hazardous, evidentiary eclecticism.

It does so by calling attention to the fact that the major authors who argue in favor of a divergence interpretation do so on the basis of a fairly select assemblage of texts in which Luther is presumed to reject the doctrine of suppositional carrying more or less explicitly. This argument is advanced, moreover, with the exception of Reinhard Schwarz, in full acknowledgement of the fact that Luther elsewhere and somewhat regularly enlists the language of suppositional carrying, even in the later years of his life from whence the alleged evidence of divergence is derived. The argument in favor of divergence, then, is *not* that Luther intentionally and self-consciously rejects the doctrine of suppositional carrying to such a consistent extent that all ancillary semantic reflections of it are expunged from his vocabulary. Instead, Luther's rejection of suppositional carrying is established on the basis of a *select series of texts* in which he is supposed

²¹Or, perhaps a bit more specifically, he never addresses in a direct and prolonged way the precise sorts of questions that would make diagnosing his actual place within the constellation of late medieval opinion straightforward. While it is tempting to identify some of Luther's early marginal notations as an exception to this rule, Schwarz's (broadly accepted) insistence that Luther initially imbibed and *later* digressed from late medieval Christology attenuates the value of these texts as direct evidence. In other words, Schwarz already concedes that Luther's early writing reflect a late medieval point of view, so arguing this point at great length would not yield any progress so far as our attempted evaluation of the divergence thesis is concerned.

either explicitly to denigrate the doctrine itself, or implicitly to deviate from its central intent. The texts that form the core of evidence are deemed sufficiently clear by advocates of the divergence thesis to warrant according them a status of hermeneutical control over other texts whose utilization of ‘supposition language’ *could* be taken as a *prima facie* indication that Luther actually remains within the parameters of late medieval christological discourse.

The contours of this argument contain implications for the methodology of what follows. In the first place, the form of the divergence argument renders it superfluous to expend significant space in the present discussion furnishing fragmentary instances of verbal acquiescence to the doctrine of suppositional carrying. The authors mentioned in the first chapter do not deny that such texts exist. This section’s focus will rest instead upon those texts essential to the legitimacy of the argument that Luther *rejects* suppositional carrying. It will demonstrate the inadequacy of a divergence interpretation of these texts. In so doing, it will expose Luther’s alleged deviation from the concept of suppositional union to lack evidentiary warrant. A careful analysis of the most frequently ‘divergence texts’ actually reveals Luther’s ongoing *assent* to a medieval view of the hypostatic union, at least so far as the model of suppositional carrying is concerned. To the examination of texts, the present section now turns.

At the headwaters of the divergence thesis’ evidence are texts in which Luther seems explicitly to take up cudgels against the doctrine of suppositional carrying, by criticizing one of its essential concepts. Without question, the most important text in this respect comes from the disputation “de divinitate et humanitate Christi” held at the

University of Wittenberg in February of 1540.²² The original composition of this disputation was provoked by the opinions of one Caspar Schwenckfeld (1489-1561), a so-called ‘radical reformer’, who insisted that that it is erroneous to refer to Christ as a ‘creature’.²³ Luther takes exception to Schwenckfeld’s criticism and seems especially concerned about its apparently burgeoning influence. He responds to Schwenckfeld in the disputation by concentrating on questions of theological language, and christological rules of predication. From this semi-polemical vantage point, Luther also reflects upon the nature of the hypostatic union, whose ontological uniqueness is the source of the linguistic complexity he hopes to clarify.²⁴

Luther’s fundamental response to Schwenckfeld is that his criticisms miss their mark. They presume a doctrinal meaning that the phrase ‘Christ is a creature’ does not actually convey. Schwenckfeld errs in this way, because he does not understand christological speech, which is always prone to misinterpretation when dogmatic intent is wholly ignored. Even an author whose intent is identifiably orthodox can have his words twisted into the defense of rank heresy. Such ambiguity will always exist, in Luther’s judgment, because human speech can never *perfectly* encapsulate or reflect its theological subject matter. In order to document this phenomenon, he furnishes a litany of statements from traditional sources, which enlist descriptive language that carries with it latent

²²WA 39/ II: 92-121.

²³Schwenckfeld also seems to have asserted the noncreatureliness of Christ’s glorified *humanity*. For more on Caspar Schwenckfeld, see Mitchell Tolpingrud, “Luther’s Disputation Concerning the Divinity and the Humanity of Christ” *Lutheran Quarterly* 10 (1996): 151; Paul L. Maier, *Caspar Schwenckfeld on the Person and Work of Christ: A Study of Schwenckfeldian Theology at Its Core* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1959); R. Emmet McLaughlin, *Caspar Schwenckfeld, Reluctant Radical: His Life to 1540*, Yale Historical Publications, 134 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986). For Luther’s precise treatment of christological predication, see the second part of this chapter.

²⁴Thus, not unlike the medieval theologians surveyed above, the question of language and ‘proper predication’ is inextricably linked with Luther’s understanding of Christology in general.

connotations or trajectories that *could* be deemed theologically problematic. It is from this litany of examples that the main evidence in favor of Luther's *explicit* rejection of suppositional carrying is derived. In theses 46 through 48, Luther remarks:

“46. But none have spoken more awkwardly [insulsius] than the Nominalists [Moderni], as they are called, who of all men wish to seem to speak most subtly and properly.

47. These say that the human nature was sustained or "supposed" by the divine nature, or by a divine supposite.

48. This is said monstrously and nearly forces God as it were to carry or bear the humanity.”²⁵

It is not difficult to understand why this text has been utilized so often to corroborate the claims of the divergence interpretation. Luther clearly identifies the medieval framework of suppositional union (thesis 47), and criticizes the image it evokes as monstrous [portentose] (thesis 48). What room is there, beneath the weight of this harsh repudiation, to suggest that Luther maintains *any* kind of allegiance to the late medieval christological framework appropriated during the years of his theological education? His comments here seem to establish the very opposite.

Such is the straightforward assumption of scholars who identify in Luther a fundamental christological divergence. Theses 46-48 practically provide the methodological *premise* of Reinhard Schwarz's essay. Because he assumes this text clearly to demonstrate that Luther *does* reject late medieval Christology, Schwarz focuses

²⁵ I am using in this section the excellent translation of the Luther's 1540 disputation carried out by Christopher Brown, available online at: <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/luther-divinity.txt>. Another translation of this disputation in English is found in Mitchell Tolpingrud, "Luther's Disputation Concerning the Divinity and the Humanity of Christ" *Lutheran Quarterly* 10 (1996): 151-78. When available, this chapter will make use of broadly available translations of Luther's works in English, and furnish pertinent sections from the original text in the footnotes. WA 39/ II, 95. "46. Nulli vero insulsius loquuntur, quam Moderni, quos vocant, qui omnium volunt subtilissime et propriissime loqui videri. 47. Hi dicunt, humanam naturam sustentari seu suppositari a divina natura, seu supposito divino. 48. Hoc et portentose dicitur et cogit pene Deum velut portare vel gestare humanitatem."

upon explaining for his reader what exactly about suppositional carrying Luther finds so offensive.²⁶ Others, like Beer and Schmidt, suspect Luther implicitly to reject the late medieval model based upon their analysis of other elements in his theology, but turn to this quote for a final verification of the theological ‘breach’ they allege.²⁷ In both cases, whether enlisted as a premise to get the argument off the ground in the first place, or as final confirmation of an interpretation advanced on the basis of other factors, theses 46-48 occupy a crucial position in the scholarly defense of the divergence thesis. But are Luther’s comments here as unambiguously dismissive of ‘suppositional carrying’ as it first appears? A re-consideration of the argument in light of its context furnishes reason to question the ‘rejection reading’, despite its *prima facie* plausibility.

The broad intent of Luther’s argument in this section of the disputation is to suggest and illustrate the fact that christological speech conveys, by virtue of its unique subject matter, a correspondingly unique significatory content, even though this new content is communicated through the very same vocabulary used in ordinary discourse. As a result of the underlying shift in semantic reference, one must be careful to avoid drawing the mistaken conclusion that theological language necessarily behaves or functions in the same way as its enlisted words and concepts function within mundane spheres of description. Schwenckfeld’s reaction to the phrase ‘Christ is a creature’ illustrates when this significatory transition of meaning is insufficiently appreciated. For Luther, Schwenckfeld errs because he interprets the term ‘creature’ to connote a thing separated from divinity, as it often does when enlisted within an ordinary sphere of

²⁶Reinhard Schwarz, “Gott ist Mensch”, 301-2. See especially note 43 in this respect.

²⁷Theobald Beer, *Der fröhliche Wechsel und Streit*, 413; Axel Schmidt, *Die Christologie in Martin Luthers späten Disputationen*, 234.

discourse. The glaring problem, of course, is that no (orthodox) Christian writer of the past defines the ‘creatureliness’ of Christ in this manner.²⁸ It is malicious, on Luther’s account, to criticize theological statements on the basis of ancillary linguistic connotations, which their authors *do not intend*.

The unique referential object of christological speech renders all human vocabulary and grammar finally inadequate to bear witness to its intended content. The mystery of the incarnation exceeds the grasp of reason and language. Because of this basic semantic incapacity, one could distill all manner of heretical meanings from even the most circumspect analogies and explanations, even when the *intended* meaning is soundly orthodox. Luther does not think that all descriptions are thereby rendered equally valid, but insists that the evaluation of christological speech must always account for intent.²⁹ After all, even an apparently orthodox formulation of words *could* conceal heterodox content, if the underlying descriptive *intent* or *meaning* deviates from the catholic faith.³⁰ Luther urges caution and insists that the use and analysis of christological speech always requires a somewhat flexible analysis, which takes into account the intrinsic deficiencies that attend the application of ordinary vocabulary to transcendent subject matter. The identification of *intent* is a mooring principle of interpretation. The

²⁸ WA 39/ II, 94. “21. Nam creatura veteris linguae usu et in aliis rebus significat rem a divinitate separatam infinitis modis.” Ibid.. “27. Qui enim dicunt, Christum esse creaturam, veteris linguae usu, id est, separatam, nulli unquam fuerunt christiani.” Luther points out in the next thesis that an ordinary meaning of ‘creature’ would be applied to Christ only by Arius and those who follow his teaching.

²⁹Luther acknowledges the importance of accurate description, and urges that only the most careful analogies be used among those uneducated in the faith.

³⁰Ibid., 96. “61. Tanta est simplicitas et bonitas Spiritus sancti, ut homines sui, dum falsa loquuntur grammaticae, vera loquuntur sensu. 62. Tanta est versutia et malitia sathanae, ut homines sui, dum vera loquuntur grammaticae, id est, verbis, mendacia loquantur theologice, id est, sensu. 63. Hic potest dici: Si mentiris, etiam quod verum dicis, mentiris; e contra, si verum dicis, etiam quod falso dicis, verum dicis. 64. Hoc est, quod dicitur haereticum esse, qui scripturas aliter intelligit, quam flagitat Spiritus sanctus.

attentive listener refuses to allow the unintended connotations of an author's enlisted vocabulary to derail him from it.³¹

In order to concretize the importance of this kind of receptive flexibility, Luther provides a series of illustrations containing statements from past theologians, each of which attempts to speak coherently about the union of God and man in Christ. The unintended theological connotations that attend these various examples demonstrate, for Luther, the way in which the theologian's task must always limp and struggle along with analogies and vocabulary intrinsically inadequate to it. The intent of the illustrations is to document how theologians *whose meaning Luther deems orthodox* can nevertheless be interpreted in heterodox ways if one is inclined to quibble over the various unintended trajectories of their descriptive vocabulary.³²

It is within this series of illustrations that one finds Luther's oft-referenced remark about the notion of 'suppositional carrying' being somehow 'monstrous.' Given the overarching intent of this section, it now appears rather unlikely that Luther's point here is to counsel the rejection of this doctrinal model as a whole. Such a conclusion would capitulate to Schwenckfeld's inordinate policing of theological language on the grounds of its unintended heretical connotations; the very practice Luther seeks here to criticize!³³

³¹For more on the precise matter of Luther's new theological language, see the subsequent discussion and attendant footnotes associated with Luther's 1539 "Disputation concerning the Passage 'The Word Became Flesh'".

³²Ibid., 95. "49. Sed omnes illi recte et catholice sapiunt, ideo condonanda est illis incommoda locutio."

50. Quia rem ineffabilem volebant effari, deinde omnis similitudo claudicat nec unquam (ut dicunt) currit quatuor pedibus."

³³The reader will also note that two other analogies from this section are admitted by Luther to suggest unwanted consequences, but are a consistent and favored component of Luther's christological vocabulary elsewhere; namely, the analogy of fire and iron, and body and soul.

No, the main trajectory of Luther's discourse highlights a methodological posture *shared with* his medieval predecessors; namely, that the analogical vocabulary of theological inquiry ought not be pushed too far, or carried outside the carefully proscribed boundaries of its explicitly intended use.³⁴ At most, Luther's comments about late medieval Christology reflect his recognition that the metaphor of 'carrying' contains problematic resonances of meaning that ought carefully to be avoided. The pertinent question regarding thesis 46 and following, then, is not: should the doctrine of suppositional carrying be rejected? Instead, we ought to ask: what unintended resonances of meaning does this description create? Why does Luther think that these resonances are theologically problematic? Does his caution comport with standard medieval qualifications, or does his critical analysis betray a fundamentally new theological trajectory?

These are the *real* question, which must occupy our attention. Advocates of a divergence interpretation will clearly insist that something disruptive and implicitly revolutionary is at work in Luther's comments here. For Beer and Schmidt, Luther's critical comments ultimately manifest the reformer's fundamental aversion to non-soteriologically determined metaphysics, thus confirming their suspicion that he implicitly dismisses the distinction between 'person' and 'nature' altogether. For Schwarz, the comments illustrate Luther's rejection of late medieval Christology as a docetic corruption.³⁵ Each of these renderings depends upon a perception of Luther's

³⁴See, for instance, Richard Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, 78.

³⁵Reinhard Schwarz, "Gott ist Mensch", 301-2. "Es ist praktisch der Vorwurf des Dokerismus, den Luther gegen die ockhamistische Christologie erhebt. Das Menschsein Gottes in Christus kann seines Erachtens nicht mit Begriffen wie *sustenare* oder *suppositare humanam naturam* gedeutet werden." Schwarz develops this interpretation on the basis of an earlier christological disputation of 1539. This disputation, and Schwarz's interpretation of it, will be addressed later in the present chapter.

theological sensibilities as distilled from *elsewhere* in his thought. Neither appeals directly to the 1540 text *as such* in order to defend its construal of how Luther thinks the language of ‘carrying’ is potentially problematic. The result is a hermeneutical spiral, which creates the impression of evidentiary progress, but actually only defers the issue in question to texts located elsewhere in Luther’s corpus. If these ‘corroborating texts’ themselves depend upon a determinate ‘divergence rendering’ of these several theses (utilized as either the cornerstone or capstone of the divergence reading as a whole), then advancing a divergence reading of the 1540 disputation on their basis introduces a circular logic that tries to assume what it first must prove.³⁶

But is the mere fact of Luther’s concern about the language of ‘carrying’ evidence of novelty? Graham White argues the opposite more likely to be the case. In his book *Luther as Nominalist*, White contends that Luther’s critical remarks in this section of the disputation comport rather seamlessly with a blatantly medieval (in fact, specifically *nominalist*) constellation of theological and philosophical concerns.³⁷ The latent risk with the language of ‘carrying’, when applied to the incarnation, is that such an image suggests that the divine Person would become a composite entity in doing so. On the late medieval account, such an implication is problematic for a number of reasons. At the

³⁶That is, it risks creating a logical relationship of symbiotic dependency between the two following statements: 1) The 1540 disputation communicates a rejection of suppositional carrying *because ancillary factors in Luther’s theology show this to be true*; and 2) Ancillary factors in Luther’s theology portend a rejection of suppositional carrying, *because the 1540 disputation shows this to be true*. The only way to address this potentially circular form of argument is to investigate each evidentiary component and ask whether either (separately or together) demonstrates the rejection of suppositional carrying attributed to it. If these components fail to demonstrate such a rejection, then the methodology will be shown to be misleading, and it may be concluded that Luther’s explicit affirmation and use of supposit vocabulary elsewhere should not be dismissed so hastily as an accidental discursive residue denuded of its original theological content.

³⁷For White’s interpretation of the 1540 disputation, see Graham White, *Luther as Nominalist*, 231-98.

very least, it seems to imply that the immutable, impassible, and simple divine Son is the passive recipient of ontological conditioning. In order to bypass this implication, nominalist theologians were cautious when using ‘compositional’ language to carefully delimit its meaning so as to proscribe any unintended semantic consequences. As White points out, theologians writing in the tradition of Ockham tend to exercise particular diligence in this regard.³⁸

Interpreted in this way, Luther’s complaint about suppositional carrying expresses a theological sensibility, which he learned under the tutelage of the very medieval theologians Beer, Schmidt, and Schwarz assume him so ruthlessly to criticize! In White’s interpretation, Luther’s derision of suppositional carrying as ‘monstrous’ reflects a theological intent wholly consonant with the Christology of late medieval nominalism. The broader context of Luther’s comment buttresses the accuracy of this view. Throughout the section, Luther furnishes a series of examples, which create the false impression that Christ is a composite entity.³⁹ If White’s construal of Luther’s intent is accurate, then one could advance the case, *contra* Schwarz *et al*, that Luther is, in fact nowhere *more* medieval in his christological predilections than when he cautions against

³⁸Ibid., 254-5. For more on the language of ‘composition’, see below.

³⁹Thesis 45 is especially clear in this regard, which immediately precedes Luther’s depiction of suppositional carrying. WA 39/II, 95. 35. “Nulli enim fuerunt unquam patres aut doctores, qui non improprie sint locuti, si dicta eorum cavillari velis 36. Sedulius poeta christianissimus canit: Beatus autor seculi servile corpus induit, idque per totam ecclesiam, 37. Cum nihil possit magis dici haereticum, quam humanam naturam esse vestem divinitatis. 38. Non enim vestis et corpus constituunt unam personam, sicut Deus et homo constituunt unam personam. 39. Tamen piissime sensisse Sedulium, caetera carmina probant evidentissime. 40. Eadem ratione haereticum esset vulgatum illud: Tota trinitas operata est incarnationem filii, sicut duae puellae tertiam induunt, ipsa simul sese induente. 41. Ita scholastici aliqui, dum divinitatis et humanitatis habitudinem sentiunt similem esse unioni formae ad materiam, non possent defendi. 42. Alii contra esse habitudinem similem materiae ad formam, multo ineptius, si iudicentur rigide, loquuntur. 43. Neque illa consisteret, ubi divinitatem igni et humanitatem ferro simulant, etiamsi sit pulcherrima similitudo. 44. Neque illam ferre liceret, quam Athanasius ponit: Sicut anima rationalis et caro unus est homo, ita Deus et homo unus est Christus. 45. Omnes enim negant, Christum esse compositum, etsi constitutum affirmant.

the unwanted ‘composite’ connotations that attend the language of suppositional ‘carrying’!⁴⁰

But is White correct? The opening theses of Luther’s argument lend significant reason to think so. In this section, Luther enlists the distinction between concrete and abstract predication as a way of clarifying the way in which certain ascriptions must be applied to Christ.⁴¹ While a nuanced discussion of this distinction’s significance for Luther’s treatment of the *communicatio idiomatum* must be deferred until the second part of this chapter, certain aspects of his discussion are crucially important here, because they manifest an underlying asymmetry within Luther’s Christology, which mirrors medieval, theological intent.

Luther is rather specific in this section of the disputation that, because the person of Christ cannot be *identified* with ‘humanity’, the application of human predicates *to Christ* must always observe the semantic restriction that such applications take place ‘in the concrete’. That is, they refer to the *person* of Christ, on account of something that truly belongs to Christ (His humanity). Christ, however, is not identical either with His humanity, or humanity in general. What is most telling is Luther’s subsequent admission that this restrictive distinction no longer applies when divine predicates are in view, at least not in the same way. “In the divine predicates or attributes

⁴⁰White’s interpretation carries the advantage of contextual sensitivity since thesis 45 deals directly with the risk of some christological language to imply a composite doctrine of Christ. In light of this fact, one is led to question how likely it is for Luther to worry in one moment about implying composition, and in the next to jettison the very conceptual vehicle through which this connotation is avoided. For more on the complex question of whether Christ is a composite, see below. Ibid., 95. “45. Omnes enim negant, Christum esse compositum, etsi constitutum affirmant.”

⁴¹This distinction between abstract and concrete predication is a fairly prominent medieval semantic device enlisted to distinguish between property ascriptions that refer either to the person of Christ (concrete), or to one of His two natures (abstract).

there is not a difference of this kind between the concrete and the abstract.”⁴² Luther’s eschewing of this distinction as it concerns divine predicates reflects the fact that, unlike the incarnate Son’s contingent relation to His humanity, Christ *is* identical with His divinity, just as the doctrine of suppositional carrying insists Him to be.

A composite rendering of this text would only be ‘feasible’, in other words, if Luther endorsed a symmetrical application of the abstract/concrete distinction. In that case, neither humanity nor divinity would relate to Christ in a relation of identity, because the person of Christ would itself be understood as the mutually-conditioned product of union. Luther forecloses this symmetry, however, and thus evidently understands the person of Christ to be coextensive with the divine nature, which assumes to itself a human nature. This exegetical intuition secures further corroboration in argument twenty eight of the public disputation’s published transcript. Here, Luther attends in greater detail to the assertion that Christ is a creature, the very affirmation that makes Schwenckfeld uneasy. In his response, Luther tangibly reflects an ongoing retention of the doctrine of suppositional carrying.

“But when we call Christ a creature, *we understand the divine person which assumed a human nature*. Nor is the creature in Christ the subject [suppositum], not even according to philosophy, but something assumed. Christ, being created, is not separated from God. Therefore he is not a creature in the old sense of the word”.⁴³

⁴²Translation by Christopher Brown. WA 39/ II, 93. “9. In divinis praedicatis seu idiomatibus non est differentia talis inter concreta et abstracta.”

⁴³Translation by Christopher Brown. Emphasis mine WA 39/II, 118a. “Nos autem dicentes Christum creaturam intelligimus divinam personam, quae assumpsit humanam naturam. Non est autem suppositum, neque in philosophia, illa creatura in Christo, sed assumpta. Christus creatus non est separatus a Deo. Ergo non est creatura in vetere significatione.” Theobald Beer, somewhat strangely, refers his reader to this text as further evidence that Luther rejects the idea of a divine suppositum entirely. Theobald Beer, *Der fröhliche Wechsel und Streit*, 408 n. 83. Beer overlooks the fact that Luther is referring here to the fact that the *human* nature is not a suppositum, the salient fact that complicates the semantics of the word ‘man’ as applied to Christ, since ordinary usage of the term *does* refer to a human suppositum. This point is pursued at greater length in the 1539 disputation discussed below. Beer’s ability to quote this text in defense of his position is a function of the truncated form in which it appears in his discussion. From this response of Luther, he cites only the following: “Es gibt kein Suppositum, auch nicht in der Philosophie.”

So, although theses 46-48 may create the initial impression that Luther rejects suppositional carrying, consultation of the larger context, yields that Luther intends nothing of the sort. To the contrary, the christological disputation of 1540 only manifests the extent to which Luther continues to presuppose the medieval doctrine's fundamental accuracy. The existence of any divergence on his part must be demonstrated elsewhere.

Another source of evidence for the divergence interpretation consists in texts where Luther enlists specific christological vocabulary that appears to reflect a 'composite' account of Christ's person. For instance, Luther will refer to the hypostatic union as a *compositus* or *additus*, and occasionally enlists semantically related verbs such as *copulatio*, *constitutio* or *coniunctio*; all of which seem to denote either a unitive theory of dialectical aggregation (Beer and Schmidt), or suggest that the Person is itself somehow constituted or ontologically conditioned *by* the union of natures (Schwarz and Lienhard).⁴⁴ If proven to carry either of these meanings, this vocabulary would indeed clearly contradict the doctrine of suppositional carrying; at least in its medieval form of articulation.⁴⁵

This rhetorical force of this argument is rather clear. It exploits an indisputable characteristic of Luther's christological discourse; namely, his occasional tendency to describe the hypostatic union with vocabulary that seems to connote a 'parts ontology' of

⁴⁴For the various citations highlighted in this respect, see Reinhard Schwarz, "Gott ist Mensch", 304-5 n. 55-7; Theobald Beer, *Der fröhliche Wechsel und Streit*, 327; 333; 400-401; 404 n. 81; 406-8; and Axel Schmidt, *Die Christologie in Martin Luthers späten Disputationen*, 237; 248.

⁴⁵On the distinction between union and aggregation, see Marilyn McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, 125.

the incarnate Person of Christ.⁴⁶ The fact that Luther even goes so far as to refer to Christ explicitly as a *compositus* appears to cement the inevitable conclusion advanced by advocates of the divergence thesis that he clearly rejects the late medieval doctrine of suppositional carrying. For how can the incarnate Christ ontologically be identified entirely with the divine Logos (as this doctrine insists) if Christ is said to be a composite of divinity and humanity? Doesn't such a designation entail the allocation of some degree of constitutive force to the human nature with respect to the personal subsistence of Christ? Isn't this exactly what Luther means to express by saying that the one Person is a composite; that is, constituted in some way by both divinity and humanity?

Such is the understandable appeal of those who argue for some version of the divergence interpretation. They contend that this vocabulary paints a picture of Christ's being that simply *cannot* exist within the framework of suppositional carrying since it entails a compound ontology of the incarnate Person, rather than identifying the incarnation's active subject with the immutable, simple and impassible divine Logos, who assumes the human nature to Himself in a relation of suppositional dependency. The salient difference between these two perspectives has to do with whether the assumption of the human nature is viewed to be ontologically 'informing' so far as the identity of the incarnate *Person* is concerned. The strength of this construal as an interpretation of Luther's vocabulary depends *entirely* upon the assumption that the word *compositus* (and others like it) unambiguously conveys the meaning assigned to it by advocates of the divergence thesis; namely, that the utilization of such terms denotes a rejection of

⁴⁶One example of this language is to be found in a text from Luther's 1532 interpretation of Psalm 45. See WA 40/II, 517b.

suppositional carrying *ipso facto*.⁴⁷ This assumption, however, is demonstrably inaccurate.

In fact, the language of Christ as a ‘composite’ is a fairly consistent aspect of the ordinary discursive vernacular of medieval theology. This observation effectively rebuts any notion that the term ‘*compositus*’ in and of itself may be taken as indication of an intrinsic rejection of suppositional carrying. To be sure, theologians of the mid to late medieval period sought rather assiduously to avoid any suggestion that the Person of Christ is somehow ontologically constructed or conditioned as the result of the hypostatic union. Also out of bounds within a medieval frame of reference would be an aggregate doctrine of Christ’s personhood as one finds in the interpretation of Luther’s Christology advanced by Beer and Schmidt. These problematic connotations notwithstanding, many theologians of the medieval period frequently make use of the language of ‘composition’ as a way of expressing certain aspects of Christ’s unique identity.⁴⁸

⁴⁷Here, as in the case of the 1540 disputation, divergence interpreters seek to buttress the plausibility of their interpretation on the basis of other texts that seem to endorse their overall point of view. In some cases, Luther’s use of this vocabulary is confirmed to denote divergence on the basis of the 1540 text itself. This sort of interconnectivity of interpretive claims makes the task of analyzing and evaluating the central argument in favor of divergence somewhat slippery. A careful reader will find herself directed (somewhat sporadically) back and forth between a number of (allegedly) mutually reinforcing interpretive judgments. The initial impression created by this approach leaves the reader with a sense that whatever claim is advanced in the main text is buttressed by clear texts taken from elsewhere in Luther’s writings. I have tried already in this chapter to show a few ways in which this impression is misleading, since the texts cited are often far more ambiguous than their use as documentary support would seem to suggest. In many cases, the textual interpretations these footnotes presume to be true are themselves dependent upon the interpretive claim advanced in the main argument their citation is intended to justify. In an attempt to break through this potential circularity, this chapter attempts to parse apart each of the centrally constitutive analytical and interpretive components that together recommend the veracity of the divergence thesis, and assess their demonstrative value *seriatim*.

⁴⁸This is not to deny the fact that many medieval theologians were also hesitant about this language to the point of advising strongly against its use altogether. The point in this brief overview is not to provide a comprehensive treatment of this question in medieval Christology, but rather to document the fact that the appearance of this vocabulary in Luther’s writings should not be viewed in any way as unique, and should certainly not be interpreted to denote an unambiguous repudiation of suppositional carrying.

According to Walter Principe, the original source of this medieval descriptive convention is to be found in John of Damascus, a theologian of the 7th and 8th century whose writings are referenced rather extensively in Peter Lombard's *Sententiae*, the standard theological textbook of the medieval period.⁴⁹ The 12th century theologian Hugh of St. Cher, as but one example of this reception, regularly refers to Christ as a composite person; a description whose intent Walter Principe helpfully elucidates.

“Hugh of Saint-Cher is a strong defender of the concept of the *persona composita*; for him it is an expressive way of stating that through and in the union of the Son of God is really, physically united to human nature, and to a human nature itself composed of body and soul. For him—and in this he differs from Alexander of Hales—the composition evoked by the phrase is to be thought of as exclusively in the human nature; taken as a whole, the phrase *persona composita* indicates that the divine person is truly united to and physically present in a composite human nature. The Incarnate Word is not, however, to be thought of as a whole composed of several parts; if body and soul may be said to be parts of the Son of God, they are so only in the sense that the simple divine person, who adds nothing to his own being by the union, unites to himself a human nature itself composed of parts.”⁵⁰

Here we may observe that, although the language of composition is applied to the *person* of Christ, the intended meaning is actually restricted to the human nature, since the incarnate Word is itself not capable of any composition or change.⁵¹

A similar qualification is to be found in the work of Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century, who also embraces composition terminology as a means of describing Christ. In

⁴⁹Walter H. Principe, *William of Auxerre's Theology of the Hypostatic Union*, The Theology of the Hypostatic Union in the Early Thirteenth Century, vol. 1 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1963), 87. For specific citations, see note 55.

⁵⁰Walter H. Principe, *Hugh of St. Cher's Theology of the Hypostatic Union*, The Theology of the Hypostatic Union in the Early Thirteenth Century, vol. 3 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1970), 147. Philip the Chancellor adopts a similar position. See Walter H. Principe, *Phillip the Chancellor's Theology of the Hypostatic Union*, The Theology of the Hypostatic Union in the Early Thirteenth Century, vol. 4 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1975), 145.

⁵¹Thus highlighting once again the normative status of the fourth criterion included in the original designation of medieval intent provided above.

his article, “Christ as Composite according to Aquinas”, Michael Gorman directs us to the most important section of Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae* on this topic.

“The person or hypostasis of Christ can be considered in two ways. One way is as something that exists in itself; in this way it is completely simple, as is the nature of the Word. The other way is as a person or hypostasis to which it is proper to subsist in some nature; in this way, the person of Christ subsists in two natures. Thus, although there is only one subsisting thing in this case, there are nevertheless two principles of subsistence. Thus he can be called a composite person, insofar as he is the one thing subsisting in two ways.”⁵²

Like Hugh of St. Cher, Aquinas affirms that Christ is a composite, but immediately qualifies the sense in which this description must be interpreted. As Gorman goes on to explain, Aquinas makes it rather clear that the divine nature (which Aquinas understands to be equivalent with the divine Word) is not in any way changed through the event of the incarnation. God does not undergo any process of ‘becoming’ as the language of composition could be taken to imply.⁵³

Even many of the late medieval nominalist, whom Luther is assumed categorically to reject, continue to defend the descriptive value of the statement that Christ is a composite, so long as this language is properly qualified. Nicholas of Oresme, for instance, whose tractate on the communication of idioms (c. 1361) appears to have framed many of the late medieval debates concerning the communication of idioms, explicitly affirms that Christ may be called a composite, but insists that this may be said

⁵²ST III, q. 2, a. 4 as quoted in Michael Gorman, “Christ as Composite according to Aquinas” *Traditio* 55 (2000): 143. Gorman’s article provides a very helpful discussion of why and how Aquinas sometimes uses the language of composition as a descriptor of Christ’s person. See also Richard Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, 51-61; 197-8; and Eleanore Stump, “Aquinas’ Metaphysics of the Incarnation”, 206-7.

⁵³On this, see Michael Gorman, “Christ as Composite according to Aquinas”, 148-52.

only *according to the humanity*.⁵⁴ Oresme carefully proscribes any notion that the joining of divinity and humanity somehow ‘makes’ or ‘forms’ the person of Christ as discrete parts ordinary constitute a whole.⁵⁵ Despite these caveats, however, the use of ‘composition terminology’ is approved for carefully proscribed, christological use. Theologians in the tradition of Ockhamism admittedly tend to be rather hesitant in this regard, although Scotists are apparently less so.⁵⁶ Now we come to the main point of this brief survey. If compositional christological vocabulary is deeply engrained within the fabric of medieval theological discourse, then why should its appearance in Luther’s writings be identified as an obvious novelty?

Axel Schmidt directly acknowledges the existence of medieval precedent, and concedes the attendant implication that compositional *language* does not necessarily evince a composite account of Christ’s person in the revolutionary ways previously described.⁵⁷ Why is it, then, that Schmidt is so quick to accuse Luther of doctrinal deviation, when he exonerates patristic and medieval antecedents on the *same* evidence? The reason, of course, is because Schmidt *already* assumes that Luther rejects suppositional carrying. Luther’s meaning *must* lie elsewhere because the fact of his divergence is presupposed on the basis of other factors. Here again the occasional

⁵⁴Ernst Borchert, *Der Einfluss des Nominalismus auf die Christologie der Spätscholastik nach dem Traktat "de communicatione idiomatum" des Nicolaus Oresme*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters 35, 4/5 (Münster i. W. 1940), 15.

⁵⁵ For a description of Oresme’s articulation of this principle, see *ibid.*, 111. For the text of Oresme’s explanation, see the edition of his tractate in the appendix of Borchert, 7-8. This is a qualification that is later taken up by the late medieval theologian Pierre d’Ailly among others. For an overview of its reception in later theology, see Graham White, *Luther as Nominalist*, 255.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 254. White’s interpretation of the 1540 disputation leads him to suggest that Luther actually sympathizes far more with the caution of the ockhamists than with the comparatively more unguarded use of compositional language enlisted in scotist Christology.

⁵⁷Axel Schmidt, *Die Christologie in Martin Luthers späten Disputationen*, 249 n. 87. It is only fair to assume that Beer, Schwarz and Lienhard are similarly aware of these antecedents.

circularity of the argument for divergence manifests itself. What ordinarily would not count as clear evidence of a deviation from suppositional carrying (the mere use of compositional language) is admitted as such, because Luther is thought *elsewhere* (I.E. his late christological disputations) to embrace this deviation explicitly.⁵⁸ Theobald Beer, although less forthright in his admission of medieval precedent for this compositional vocabulary, marshals the ‘composite evidence’ in a similar way, by using the already-analyzed theses from the 1540 disputation as hermeneutical confirmation for his interpretation.⁵⁹ But if the 1540 disputation provides no such corroboration, then the secondary argument evaporates along with it. A careful exegesis of the 1540 text therefore kills two evidentiary birds with one stone.

Another source of evidence used to defend the divergence interpretation consists of texts in which Luther is alleged to embrace a *symmetrical* account of divinity and humanity as they relate to the Person of Christ. Such an account differs from the standard medieval point of view, as we have already explained, because it refuses to differentiate between the distinct ways in which Christ relates to His divine nature on the one hand, and to His human nature on the other; preferring instead simply to assert their union in a more straightforward fashion.⁶⁰ The result of such symmetry is a composite doctrine of Christ in which both divinity and humanity exert a common constitutive role in the

⁵⁸See *ibid.*, 249.

⁵⁹Theobald Beer, *Der fröhliche Wechsel und Streit*, 405.

⁶⁰As described in previous sections of this chapter, the asymmetrical account of this relation in medieval Christology derives from the fact that whereas Christ simply *is* divine (that is, the Person of Christ is identical with the pre-incarnate divine Logos), Christ is human only in the sense that the divine Person has assumed into suppositional dependency a fully intact human nature. This suppositional dependency does not carry with it any notion of ontological conditioning for the medievals, even though they will still insist that the relation of ‘personal carrying’ is sufficient for securing the validity of the incarnation. Although Schwarz does not specifically invoke this language, it is clear from his account that he understands Luther to reject this prohibition against ontological conditioning; a correlate of his composite doctrine of Christ’s personhood.

ontological makeup of the incarnation's acting subject. It should be clear by this point in the chapter why such a view is understood by advocates of the divergence interpretation to grate against the doctrine of suppositional carrying. For Schwarz, the symmetry of Luther's position is the heart of the reformer's anti-docetist correction of nominalist Christology. By according the human nature an equally ontologically determinative status in the existence of the theandric Person, Schwarz understands Luther to override the philosophical axiom of late medieval scholasticism, which stipulates an unbridgeable gap between divinity and humanity. For Schmidt and Beer, on the other hand, the symmetry of Luther's position provides evidence that, although he sometimes *speaks* as if he retains a traditional distinction between 'person' and 'nature', the actual contents of his christological explanation betray the traditionalist façade. The result of the distinction's practical betrayal is that Luther is forced to affirm the unity of divinity and humanity on a univocal metaphysical plane, thus necessitating his composite doctrine of the hypostatic union (through juxtaposition or aggregation). The result is a dialectical nestorianism with oddly monophysite resonances.

Some of the evidence marshaled in favor of this allegedly 'symmetrical' christological vantage point depends upon texts *far* more ambiguous than their use by advocates of a divergence interpretation would seem to suggest. Schwarz, for instance, lays special emphasis upon Luther's rather emphatic endorsement of the statement that "God *is* man", and implies that such a statement alone demonstrates an obvious, fundamental departure from late medieval Christology. Schwarz reaches this conclusion because, on his account, the doctrine of suppositional carrying allows its practitioners to speak of the incarnation only in a far more logically circuitous, and tentative way.

Luther's forthrightness in these statements, accordingly, is taken as indication that he cuts through arcane metaphysical qualifications, which actually denude the doctrine of the hypostatic union of its fundamental content.⁶¹ Luther is alleged to stress a degree of identity between the divinity and humanity of Christ, which intrinsically overrides the asymmetrical distinctions ingredient to the doctrine of suppositional carrying. Luther's zeal for the reality of the incarnation leads him to transgress traditionally erected, metaphysical borders.

In a parallel line of argument, Schmidt and Beer allege Luther's apparent elision of the distinction between Persons and natures on the basis of his strident, and apparently unprecedented identification of divinity and humanity in Christ. Taking up a designation rather common in recent literature, Beer and Schmidt suggest that Luther's Christology depends upon the existence of a radical *union of opposites*; and by this they mean to suggest that Luther's doctrine of the hypostatic union entails a fundamental contravention of ordinary reason, and simply contradicts the rules of philosophical grammar (I.E. the rule of non-contradiction).⁶² Although many scholars understand the resultant propositional paradox this creates in a positive light, for Beer and Schmidt, it represents a

⁶¹Reinhard Schwarz, "Gott ist Mensch", 303-4; 307-8. "Dass Gott Mensch geworden ist, dass der Schoepfer und das Geschoepf in Christus dieselbe Person ist, gerade darauf baut die Theologie". Schwarz assumes that no medieval theologian could say such a thing; an assumption that the next chapter shows to be utterly unfounded. Despite this fact, one finds permutations of this claim scattered across contemporary interpretations of Luther's significance. In its least guarded form, these interpretations make it seem as if Luther is the first theologian in the history of Christendom to *actually* affirm the doctrine of the incarnation.

⁶²See, for instance, Axel Schmidt, *Die Christologie in Martin Luthers späten Disputationen*, 202; 244-5. Schmidt's main evidence is that Luther asserts creator and creature to be one. Schmidt's rationale behind a decisively novel interpretation of this assertion (for surely he is aware that Christian theologians had been saying similar things long before Luther was born) is again the 1540 disputation, which, in his mind, expunges the possibility that this union could be envisioned in terms of a 'personal' union. In other words, Luther must be trying simply to force a unity on the same ontological plane. Here again, though, if the interpretation of the 1540 disputation is incorrect, then this evidence also fails.

desperate and ultimately fruitless attempt on Luther's part to secure a conceptually durable explanation of the hypostatic union.⁶³ This attempt is fruitless, because it implicitly forfeits the necessary distinction between persons and natures that any such explanation would require. The so-called 'identity of opposites' upon which Luther settles is seen, then, as a counterfeit simulacrum of orthodox Christology. It enables hollow affirmation of union, which scrambles (unsuccessfully) to find a way to deny the very entailment its practical rejection of the distinction between persons and natures necessitates; namely an unresolved, quasi-Nestorian fissure between divinity and humanity.

In both instances, the argument depends upon the notion that Luther asserts something that is clearly impossible to affirm within a medieval frame of reference, with its decidedly *asymmetrical* account of the incarnate Person of Christ.⁶⁴ Neither set of textual evidence succeeds, though, in establishing that something this radically new *must*

⁶³ The alleged paradox has its roots in Luther's alleged attempt to engage divinity and humanity on the same ontological plane. Whereas the doctrine of suppositional carrying provides a kind of internal differentiation that parses this relationship, the 'coincidence of opposites reading' rejects this asymmetrical arrangement and tries to stand the divine nature and human nature on an equal playing field. The resulting account of union makes it plausible to wonder how it is possible to maintain *both* sets of Chalcedonian proscriptions at the same time, even though most authors will insist this to be the case. Here I would tend to agree with Schmidt and Beer that there seems to be a necessary choice between either a kind of monophysite mixture of divinity and humanity such that the only differentiation available would be analeptic in nature (that is, one that must recall the prior differentiation that no longer perdures in any *actual* once the incarnation has taken place), *or* the union itself must be a mere juxtaposition or perhaps agential coordination of two fundamentally separate entities (thus, Nestorianism). Schmidt and Beer's problem, in my view, is not so much in their theological analysis of this view, but in their failure to see that *Luther* does not endorse it. It is understandable, on the basis of the literature predating their work that they would draw the conclusion that he does, but this dissertation hopes to demonstrate some key ways in which this reading is inadequate.

⁶⁴ The claim between these two groups is once again remarkably similar, despite the fact that they argue for radically different appraisals of Luther's alleged innovation. Schmidt, for instance, agrees with Schwarz's point that Luther is arguing for a degree of unification between God and man that is simply beyond the capacity of medieval Christology to affirm. Whereas Schwarz thinks this fact proves Luther's correction of late medieval docetism, Schmidt thinks his proposal terminates in philosophical nonsense; and places Luther in the unintended conundrum of having to vacillate between either sheer juxtaposition of natures (Nestorianism) and a divine-human mixture (monophysitism).

be read into the data, nor even that it is exegetically *plausible* to posit such novelty. In fact, a consideration of Luther's allegedly innovative language in relation to its medieval context once again seriously attenuates the likelihood of such an interpretation. For Schwarz's argument in this area to succeed, it would need to be true that late medieval Christology is incapable of affirming the dogmatic assertion that 'God *is* man'. But doesn't such an interpretation strangely presuppose that Luther's scholastic predecessors can't uphold the doctrine of the incarnation? Surely such a view is the product of Schwarz's own anachronistic prejudice, rather than the result of historical exegesis of late medieval views interpreted on their own terms. In any case, there is simply no evidence to commend the conclusion that Luther's statement that 'God *is* man' implies a fundamental departure from the doctrine of his scholastic teachers.

In reality, one finds that the phrase 'God is man', along with others expressing appreciably *more radical* content, is the explicit object of late medieval assent; albeit always under the supervisory conditions of very specific qualifications.⁶⁵ Schwarz himself tacitly recognizes this to be true, as reflected in his detailed treatment of Gabriel Biel's interpretation of "God is man".⁶⁶ The pertinent question, then, is not *whether* such a statement (God is man) is affirmed (for all orthodox theologians of the time period surely intend to uphold the doctrine of the incarnation!), but *how* it is interpreted.

⁶⁵See the discussion of this phrase provided in Richard Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation*, 185-9.

⁶⁶Reinhard Schwarz, "Gott ist Mensch", 322f. The products of this survey are the pessimistic account of nominalist Christology that we have already suggested form the baseline of comparison against which Schwarz adjudicates Luther's relationship to suppositional carrying. Space precludes a point by point analysis of Schwarz's view here. The question that concerns us is whether Luther's own view of this statement entails a rejection of suppositional carrying as specified above. For a devastating criticism of Schwarz's interpretation of Biel, see Graham White, *Luther as Nominalist*, 271-80. White's argument in this respect provides further corroboration of the fact that Schwarz's diagnosis of Luther is incorrect, since he has skewed the data by advancing an inordinately pejorative account of Biel, only then to prove on its basis that Luther moves beyond it.

Schwarz seeks to dissociate Luther from his late medieval environment not because one explicitly affirms the incarnation while the other explicitly does not, but because he thinks the late medieval doctrine of suppositional carrying impedes this genuine affirmation, and understands Luther's apparent rejection of it to provide a much needed conceptual course correction.

If this is the case, though, then the mere statement "God is man" in Luther's writing hardly counts as evidence one way or the other. Its presence is decidedly ambiguous so far as the question of Luther's alleged divergence is concerned. Like theses 46-48 of the 1540 disputation, as well as Luther's use of compositional vocabulary, its demonstrative value relies entirely upon a verification of the divergence thesis based upon additional factors. The same verdict applies to texts in which Luther is understood to embrace a doctrinally unprecedented understanding of the hypostatic union in terms of a 'coincidence of opposites', as Schmidt and Beer contend. The colorful christological language thought to furnish evidence for this view is identifiable within the patterns of patristic and medieval discourse, and as such, cannot bear the demonstrative weight the divergence interpretation seeks to assign to it.⁶⁷ In short, neither proves a 'symmetrical' account of Christ's Person as it might initially seem.

⁶⁷One very early instance of such juxtaposition of opposites occurs in the writings of Ignatius of Antioch. Note, for instance, the following christological reflection as quoted in Thomas Weinandy, "Ignatius of Antioch", in *The Zondervan Handbook to the History of Christianity*, edited by Jonathan Hill (Oxford: Lion Publishing), 51. "Very Flesh, yet Spirit too; Uncreated, and yet born; God-and-Man in One agreed, Very-Life-in-Death indeed, Fruit of God and Mary's seed. At once impassible and torn by pain and suffering here below: Jesus Christ, whom as our Lord we know." Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) is also rather fond of juxtaposition of opposites language. See, as an example of this, the texts referenced in Walter Allgaier, *Der "froehliche Wechsel" bei Martin Luther; eine Untersuchung zu Christologie und Soteriologie bei Luther unter besonderer Beruecksichtigung der Schriften bis 1521* (Dissertation: Erlangen-Nürnberg, 1966), 119.

Perhaps most important to a ‘symmetrical’ interpretation of Luther’s Christology is a divergence appraisal of Luther’s 1539 “Disputation concerning the Passage: ‘The Word Was Made Flesh.’”⁶⁸ Rather like the 1540 text, the disputation of 1539 turns on a question of theological language.⁶⁹ Theses 4-7 of the disputation introduces a statement, which Luther assumes to have originated from the Sorbonne faculty in Paris. This statement argues that truth is *exactly the same*, whether articulated in theology or philosophy.⁷⁰ Luther makes it rather clear, even at the outset of his argument, that he regards this seamless understanding of the relation between disciplines as grossly deficient. Much of the disputation is occupied with an attempt to demonstrate *why* such a view is unsatisfactory, and argue in favor of a preferable alternative. Luther’s efforts along these lines are complex, and the development of his argument touches upon a range of far-reaching issues, many of which lie outside the scope of this chapter. At the heart of his counter-proposal, is his insistence that theological and philosophical speech must be parsed into two distinct spheres of discourse, both of whose contents agree generally with ‘truth’ in a final sense (thus avoiding any notion that these ‘spheres’ are mutually

⁶⁸WA 39/II, 1-33. English translation available in LW 38, 235-77.

⁶⁹For a helpful overview of the central themes covered in this disputation see Reijo Työrinoja, “Proprietas Verbi: Luther’s Conception of Philosophical and Theological Language in the Disputation: Verbum caro factum est (Joh. 1:14), 1539”. *Faith, Will, and Grammar: Some Themes of Intensional Logic and Semantics in Medieval and Reformation Thought*, Schriften der Luther-Agricola-Society, no B 15 (Helsinki: Vammalan Kirjapaino Oy, 1986), 143-78; and Graham White, *Luther as Nominalist*, 124-80.

⁷⁰WA 39/II, 3-4. “4. Sorbona, mater errorum, pessime definivit, idem esse verum in philosophia et theologia. 5. Impieque damnavit eos, qui contrarium disputaverunt. 6. Nam hac sententia abominabili docuit captivare articulos fidei sub iudicium rationis humanae. 7. Hoc erat aliud nihil, quam coelum et terram includere in suo centro aut grano milii.” For a discussion of the actual historical document to which Luther may be referring, see Reijo Työrinoja, “Proprietas Verbi”, 145-6. See also Stefan Streiff, “*Novis linguis loqui*.” *Martin Luthers Disputation über Joh 1,14 "verbum caro factum est" aus dem Jahr 1539* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1993), 72-90. Streiff argues on page 41 of the same book that Luther means to attack a central tenet of scholastic theology in general. White and Työrinoja both suggest, on the contrary, that the discussion Luther is taking up is one over which there was much diversity of opinion throughout the late medieval period. In this light, both Streiff and Schwarz appear hasty in their attempt to distill here a fundamental shift over against medieval dogma in general.

contradictory), but reflect upon the peculiar objects of their analysis in different ways and according to different rules of speech.⁷¹ This overall proposal is reflected in the theses that circumscribe the disputation as a whole.

“1. Although the saying, “Every truth is in agreement with every other truth,” is to be upheld, nevertheless, what is true in one field of learning is not always true in other fields of learning.”⁷²

“40. We would act more correctly if we left dialectic and philosophy in their own area and learned to speak in a new language in the realm of faith apart from every sphere.

41. Otherwise, it will turn out that, if we put the new wine in old wineskins, both of them will perish; this is what the Sorbonne did.

42. In articles of faith, the disposition of faith is to be exercised, not the philosophical intellect. Only then will we truly know what this means: “The Word was made flesh.”⁷³

For the sake of focus, the following discussion will seek neither to provide a nuanced analysis nor evaluative appraisal of this programmatic proposal. It will ask, more

⁷¹That Luther wants to avoid contradiction is rendered clear in his claim in thesis 1 that one must uphold the notion that all truth agrees with truth. WA 39/II, 3. “1. Etsi tenendum est, quod dicitur: Omne verum vero consonat, tamen idem non est verum in diversis professionibus.” The semantic yield of Luther’s proposal manifests itself in the notion of a ‘new language’ or ‘grammar’ whose words continue to signify the same objects as in their more mundane usage, but do so in a different way or with a new modality. Although interpretations of this phenomenon in Luther’s thought are legion, suffice it here to suggest that Luther’s concern is to reserve some continuity of meaning between ‘new’ and ‘old’ in order to bypass the kind of sheer equivocation that would cause theology to degenerate into linguistic nonsense; while, at the same time, his insistence that this signification operates in a new way as the result of its referential transition upon a unique and transcendent object. Although Luther’s occasionally sharp distinction between philosophy and theology has made it appear plausible to a handful of scholars that his thought produces a ‘double theory’ of truth, such a construal succeeds only to the extent that the first aspect of this tension is either ignored or seriously downplayed. How exactly Luther balances his position between the Scylla of seamless univocity and the Charybdis of pure equivocation, and whether or not the result is logically tenable are not questions that may occupy our attention here. For a helpful treatment of the theme of ‘new’ and ‘old’ language in Luther’s theology, and its relation to univocation and equivocation, see Graham White, *Luther as Nominalist*, 177-9; 299-348; and Stefan Streiff, *Novis linguis loqui! Martin Luthers Disputation über Joh 1,14 "verbum caro factum est" aus dem Jahr 1539* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1993). Streiff, however, is dependent upon Schwarz for his construal of Luther’s relation to late medieval Christology.

⁷² LW 38, 239. WA 39/II, 3. “1. Etsi tenendum est, quod dicitur: Omne verum vero consonat, tamen idem non est verum in diversis professionibus.”

⁷³ LW 38, 242. WA 39/II, 5. “40. Rectius ergo fecerimus, si dialectica seu philosophia in sua sphaera relictis discamus loqui novis linguis in regno fidei extra omnem sphaeram. 41. Alioqui futurum est, ut vinum novum in utres veteres mittamus, et utrumque perdamus, ut Sorbona fecit. 42. Affectus fidei exercendus est in articulis fidei, non intellectus philosophiae. Tum vere sciatur, quid sit: Verbum caro factum est.”

modestly, what the disputation suggests about Luther's relation to late medieval Christology; the very question treated so prevalently by 'divergence interpretations' of this work.⁷⁴ Such a concentration does not stray too far, though, from the central concern of Luther's argument. Christology occupies an important place in the argument, because Luther thinks it especially clear that the purported univocity of the Sorbonne's statement shipwrecks itself on the shoals of christological description. The centrality of this contention is clear already in theses two and three, where Luther remarks:

"2. In theology it is true that the Word was made flesh; in philosophy the statement is simply impossible and absurd.

3. The declaration, "God is man," is not less but even more contradictory than if you would say, "Man is an ass.""⁷⁵

How exactly Luther thinks the Sorbonne's account of theology and philosophy flounders christologically is made clear in the published record of the ensuing academic

⁷⁴For a treatment of the broader issues at stake (for instance, Luther's understanding of the relation between theology and philosophy), see the pertinent discussions in Reijo Työrinoja, "Proprietas Verbi: Luther's Conception of Philosophical and Theological Language in the Disputation: Verbum caro factum est (Joh. 1:14), 1539". *Faith, Will, and Grammar: Some Themes of Intensional Logic and Semantics in Medieval and Reformation Thought*, Schriften der Luther-Agricola-Society, no B 15 (Helsinki: Vammalan Kirjapaino Oy, 1986), 143-78; Stefan Streiff, *Novis linguis loqui! Martin Luthers Disputation über Joh 1,14 "verbum caro factum est" aus dem Jahr 1539* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1993); Graham White, *Luther as Nominalist: A Study of the Logical Methods Used in Martin Luther's Disputations in the Light of Their Medieval Background* (Helsinki, Finland: Luther-Agricola-Society, 1994); Christine Helmer, *The Trinity and Martin Luther: A Study on the Relationship between Genre, Language and the Trinity in Luther's Works, 1523-1546* (Mainz: P. von Zabern, 1999); and Bengt Häggglund, *Theologie und Philosophie bei Luther und in der Occamistischen Tradition; Luthers Stellung zur Theorie von der doppelten Wahrheit* (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1955).

⁷⁵ LW 38, 239. WA 39/II, 3. "2. In theologia verum est, verbum esse carnem factum, in philosophia simpliciter impossibile et absurdum. 3. Nec minus, imo magis disparata est praedicatio: Deus est homo, quam si dicas: Homo est asinus." Despite Schmidt's suggestion that such juxtapositions show how Luther simply wishes to bulldoze philosophical distinctions altogether; or Schwarz's contention that Luther simply casts aside the restrictive framework of bad philosophy, we must observe that Luther is far from unique here. The very same line of thought is entertained, for instance, by the late medieval scholastic Gabriel Biel. See Biel, Gabriel, Wilfrid Werbeck, Udo Hofmann, Martin Elze, Renate Steiger, Hanns Rückert, and Volker Sievers, *Gabrielis Biel collectorium circa quattuor libros Sententiarum: Liber tertius, Gabrielis Biel Collectorium Circa Quattuor Libros Sententiarum* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr-P. Siebeck, 1979), 174. Biel is acknowledging the objection that it seems absurd to affirm the incarnation, because, in philosophy God and man are "termini disparati". This mirrors the progression of Luther's argument in a 1537 sermon on John 3 that we will investigate in the second part of this chapter.

debate provided in the Weimar edition of Luther's works.⁷⁶ These texts show the heart of his criticism to be an accusation that the Sorbonne can sustain a univocal coordination of theology and philosophy regarding the statement 'God is man', only if it admits two, basically *equivocal* designations of the term 'man.' Ordinarily, the term 'man' refers to a human nature or a rational animal, which subsists as its *own* supposit. A 'man', in other words, is a human secondary substance, which is carried into individually subsistent existence on account of its own nature alone.⁷⁷ This definition, however, simply does not work if transitioned univocally into the theological sphere. The incarnate Son of God simply is not a 'man' in this philosophical sense since, on the scholastic account anyway, Christ is 'human' only in the sense that the divine Person *assumes* a human nature into a relation of alien suppositional dependency.⁷⁸

It is therefore rather misleading to claim complete univocity of meaning between the following two statements: 1) 'Socrates is a man'; and 2) 'Christ is a man.' The assertion of complete significatory univocity is inappropriate in this context because an important transition of meaning differentiates the function of the term 'man' in both cases.⁷⁹ Albeit ostensibly slight in its extent, such a differentiation of meaning forecloses

⁷⁶The Weimar edition preserves three written accounts of the proceedings. The discussion above will seek to avoid drawing any significant conclusions from aspects of one version or another whose contents are clearly idiosyncratic in comparison with its counterparts.

⁷⁷Marilyn McCord Adams points out that, in late medieval discourse, a "man is a nature composed of body and intellectual soul that is sustained by no suppositum or it is a suppositum that sustains such a nature composed of body and intellectual soul." See Marilyn McCord Adams, "Relations, Inherence and Subsistence", 69. The human nature of Socrates, in other words, *is* its own suppositum according to this description. See her further discussion on page 72.

⁷⁸WA 39/II, 10b.

⁷⁹This differentiation does not affect the truth-value of the statement 'Christ is man' in Luther's mind because it rightly names the fact that Christ, like all other human beings, is in possession of a completely intact human nature. This fact, though, does not necessarily mean that Christ *relates* to his human nature in exactly the same way that ordinary human beings do, a caveat buttressed by late medieval accounts of the incarnation in terms of alien suppositional carrying. Once this caveat is acknowledged,

the validity of any syllogism whose premises depend upon a consistently stable definition of the term ‘man’. If all this is true, Luther argues, the initial, programmatic statement affirming a seamless harmony of discursive meaning across the disciplinary boundary of theology and philosophy succeeds only by *cannibalizing* itself. The thesis of undisturbed univocity, in other words, depends in its execution upon an equivocation of terms. Such, in rather broad outline, are the grounds upon which Luther criticizes the Sorbonne statement.

The salient question for the purposes of this study, is what Luther’s critical view of the Sorbonne statement suggests about his relation to the Christology of late medieval nominalism. Authors who interpret the disputation as evidence in favor of a divergence insist that Luther’s argument reflects a fundamental rejection of suppositional carrying. For Reinhard Schwarz, the complaint about equivocation is itself intended primarily to express Luther’s dissatisfaction with a nominalist account of Christ’s humanity as a non-personal, ontologically non-informing accident somehow carried along by the divine Suppositum.⁸⁰ The problem with such a view, in Schwarz’s construal, is that it fails to secure the genuine ‘truth value’ of the incarnation. To be sure, the nominalists *think* that

though, a theologian is faced with a significant methodological choice. Either one will try to ambiguate the ordinary meaning the word ‘man’ so as to include the unique instance in which the divine Person assumes to itself a human nature in an attempt to achieve a thorough-going discursive symmetry between theology and philosophy; or, one will admit the different *way* in which Christ is called man, thus leaving relatively undisrupted the integrity of philosophical discourse, while at the same time finding a way to uphold and talk about the unique event of the incarnation. Marilyn McCord Adams illustrates rather helpfully how currents in late medieval theology and philosophy contributed to the urgency of this question specifically in relation to the vocabulary of supposits. See her essay: Marilyn McCord Adams, “What’s Metaphysically Special about Supposits?”. Luther’s treatment of the Sorbonne statement in the 1539 disputation appears to have far more to do with these methodological concerns, rather than with any attempt on his part to suggest the fundamental bankruptcy of late medieval Christology in general. To the contrary, it is precisely *because* Luther retains a late medieval point of view that he suggests a totally univocal position to be problematic.

⁸⁰That is, the notion that Christ’s humanity is not expressed personally in the sense that the *divine* Supposit is identified with the person of Christ.

suppositional carrying enables the confession that God became man, but Schwarz deems the semantically circuitous way in which they qualify this statement to terminate in a kind of semantic illusion or betrayal. That is, although the medieval theologians find a way to enable assent to the doctrine of the incarnation, the actual contents of their view can *really* only affirm that “God is God” and “man is man.”⁸¹ All of this amounts, for Schwarz, to a theological equivocation of massive proportions. In light of this analysis, Schwarz understandably assumes that Luther’s pervasive rant against equivocal language accordingly has as its final target a nominalist understanding of the incarnation in terms of suppositional carrying. Framed in this manner, Luther’s argument would proceed basically as follows:

1. If a seamless continuity exists between theological and philosophical spheres of discourse, then all theological statements must fall within the boundaries of pre-determined philosophical possibility.
2. If theological statements must fall within these restrictive boundaries, then the incarnation must be construed in such a way that avoids any true unity of infinity (God) with the finite (man).
3. But if the incarnation is interpreted in this way, then theology is forced into a logically futile attempt to affirm union (the doctrine of the incarnation) while at the same time actually denying it.
4. The result is an interpretation of the statement ‘God is man’ (suppositional carrying) that denudes this confession of its actual content.
5. Thus, what begins in an attempt to secure the univocity of signification between philosophical and theological discourse terminates in an *equivocal* explication of the incarnation.
6. Therefore, it is inappropriate to assert a seamless continuity between theological and philosophical spheres of discourse.

The problem with this construal is that Luther’s complaint against equivocation in the 1539 disputation does not sprout from his underlying *rejection* of suppositional carrying, but emerges *precisely because* he accepts a late medieval account of the metaphysics of

⁸¹See Streiff’s representation of Schwarz’s argument in Stefan Streiff, “*Novis linguis loqui*”: Martin Luthers Disputation über Joh 1,14 “*verbum caro factum est*” aus dem Jahr 1539 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1993), 62

the incarnation as normative. By missing this aspect of the disputation, Schwarz's interpretation distorts, and very nearly inverts the actual intent of Luther's critique. So far as the christological application of the Sorbonne's statement is concerned, Luther regards its claim in favor of a seamless continuity between theological and philosophical discourse as misleading not because such a view terminates in an unacceptable Christology, but because it artificially cloaks important (medieval) christological distinctions *that he assumes to be valid*. One clear illustration of this phenomenon is to be found in argument's 3a and 4, as recorded in the 'C' account of the public debate.⁸²

The objection to which Luther responds in this section is the assertion that the term 'man' is, in fact, attributed univocally of God (that is, the second Person of the Trinity), and that one may therefore licitly refer to God as a 'thinking animal'.⁸³ Luther's concern in this response is not to confute or criticize the proposed predication that God (in Christ) is a rational animal, but focuses instead upon the major premise understood to get this predication off of the ground, namely, the assumption that the term 'man' is applied to God univocally; that is, in the same way that it is applied to human beings other than Christ. Luther addresses the point as follows:

"When I speak of God as man, I cannot deny that he is a thinking animal; here the Scholastic theologians have admitted that Christ was a rational animal and man. However, they distinguish senses of the word "man" and say that it is equivocal, so that, when it refers to anyone of the human race apart from the incarnation, it designates a person subsisting by himself. This is a philosophical meaning. It has another meaning when it is said about Christ. Here one does not interpolate that fictitious philosophical

⁸²These recorded arguments correspond with theses 3 and 4 of the published disputation.

⁸³As a caveat, it may be observed that the adjudication of statements such as this one (which may appear rather strange) is a persistent custom of nominalist Christology, especially in its extensive discussions regarding the communication of attributes. For more on this practice, see the second part of this chapter.

concept of a person. For here a new word is coined, designating the divine person sustaining our human one, as a white person signifies a man who maintains whiteness.”⁸⁴

It is crucially important for the purposes of this section to explicate the significance of what Luther is arguing here. Assumed in his response is the observation that an ordinary meaning of the term ‘man’ *cannot* be applied without modification to the incarnate Person of Christ. The reason for this is that an ordinary application of ‘man’ designates not a human *nature*, but a human *person*. That is, it refers to a self-subsisting entity or suppositum. But this cannot apply to Christ, Luther continues, because Christ is not a self-subsisting human nature, but a divine person *carrying* a human nature. Thus, while we may observe that the term ‘man’ continues to denote an entity possessing an intact human nature (otherwise Luther would be forced to reject the truth value of the statement that Christ is a rational animal), the relation of this human nature to the person in which it subsists differs rather markedly from ordinary usage. Whereas ‘man’ usually refers to a *human* person, as applied to Christ it signifies a *divine* person, albeit one that sustains a genuine human nature.

The main point we must glean from this discussion is that Luther’s complaint is emphatically *not* that the doctrine of suppositional carrying introduces an unacceptable equivocal representation of the incarnation as Schwarz alleges. To the contrary, it is precisely *because* Luther endorses the metaphysical qualifications embedded within this

⁸⁴ LW 38, 271. WA 39/II, 10c. “Quando dico Deum hominem, non possum negare, quod et sit animal sensitivum; hic theologi scholastici concesserunt, quod Christus esset animal rationale et homo. Distinxerunt autem homines, et significat aequivocum, ut, quando significat aliquem de genere humano extra incarnationem, significat personam per sese subsistentem. Haec est significatio philosophica. Alia est, quando de Christo dicitur. Hic non supponit illam fictam personam philosophicam. Hic enim fit novum vocabulum significans personam divinam sustentantem nostram humanam, ut albus significat hominem sustentantem albedinem.”

doctrine that he counsels against cloaking these signficatory qualifications underneath a misleading veneer of purported univocity of meaning.⁸⁵ The progression of Luther's logic, then, may be summarized as follows:

1. If the articulation of truth is exactly the same in theology and philosophy, then the common terms applied in each must share complete univocity of signficatory meaning.
2. If a completely univocal application of terms unites theological and philosophical spheres of discourse, it would need to be true, for instance, that the theological confession "Christ is *man*" expresses the exact same content as it does when the term 'man' is applied to any other rational animal.
3. This does not follow, though, since in the case of Christ, 'man' denotes a *divine* Person carrying a human nature; whereas in other discursive settings it denotes a *human* Person subsisting in itself.
4. Therefore, the articulation of truth cannot be exactly the same in theology and philosophy.

The turning point in this logical sequence arrives in step three, where Luther acknowledges a differentiation of meaning precisely *because* he takes it for granted that

⁸⁵ Schwarz justifies the transition of Luther's accusation of 'equivocation' against the Sorbonne onto late medieval Christology on the basis of Luther's reference to Gabriel Biel in WA 39/II, 11c-12c. "Univoce homo sumptum non verum est in theologia, sed in philosophia. Quando vero aequivoce non subsistit syllogismus 4 terminorum, sic ipsi Parisienses distinguunt, et tamen dicunt, idem esse verum in philosophia et theologia. Cur ergo distinguunt? Si esset idem, deberet etiam esse univocatio, idem verbum, eadem significatio. Nescientes ergo, quid dicant, tamen distinguunt a philosophia theologiam. Alii sumpserunt hominem univoce, ut Gabriel, ille incurrit in hunc syllogismum: Omnis homo est creatura. Occam voluit, non esse univocum, sed aequivocum, ut aliud sit humanitas in Petro, aliud in Christo. Homo in philosophia secundum naturam suam non significat filium Dei aut personam divinam. Hoc idem est, quod nos dicimus: communicatio idiomatum. Syllogismus non admittitur in mysteriis fidei et theologiae. Philosophia est error in theologia." There are several reasons why interpreting this section as an indication that Luther means to jettison the doctrine of suppositional carrying is misleading. In the first place, such a reading is implausible because the very premise of Luther's response is that the univocal view does not work because, in theology, the word 'man' refers to a divine Person, not a human one. The previous response (provided in the text above) confirms the fact that Luther means, by this, to affirm the doctrine of suppositional carrying rather than deny it. Second, Luther's use of Biel here is not meant to illustrate the bankruptcy of his Christology, but rather to show that, *if* one tries to use the term 'man' in a univocal way, then one must reject the validity of any syllogism that depends upon Christ being a 'man' in exactly the same way that we are, because this would imply that Christ is a *human* Person subsisting by itself. In other words, Luther is arguing that the Sorbonne may not have its discursive cake and eat it too. Either one must admit some kind of distinction of meaning in the word 'man', and thus own up to a non-univocal (though not necessarily starkly equivocal) relationship between theological and philosophical discourse (as Luther claims Occam to do), *or*, one must deny the unqualified validity of the syllogism that "Every man is a creature. Christ is a man. Therefore Christ is a creature" as Biel evidently does. Here again, the focus is on the nature of theological speech. The argument assumes and depends upon the *legitimacy* of the doctrine of suppositional carrying. Graham White helpfully situates Luther's comments on the term 'man' to late medieval discussions over the same topic. See Graham White, *Luther as Nominalist*, 161-2.

the scholastic conception of the incarnate Christ as a divine Person carrying the human nature is normative. Interpreted in this way, Luther's argument presents itself as more of a plea for discursive honesty, than a revolutionary assault against late medieval Christology writ large. Schwarz's argument to the contrary represents a misconstrual of Luther's christological views. Luther's complaint against the Sorbonne statement is founded, not by his implicit rejection of late medieval Christology as equivocal in its account of Jesus' humanity, but by his fundamental presupposition of the doctrine of suppositional carrying as a valid explanation of the hypostatic union.⁸⁶

Perhaps somewhat paradoxically, Axel Schmidt's treatment of the 1539 disputation actually reinforces this criticism of Schwarz, even though he also purports to find in the disputation evidence of divergence. Schmidt acknowledges that Luther's explicit discussion of the Person of Christ in this disputation mirrors the late medieval account. This fact perplexes him because he has already concluded that Luther rejects late medieval Christology. Schmidt's solution to the resultant evidentiary quandary is to suggest that two irreconcilable strands exist within Luther's theology, and that each of these strands manifests itself in the 1539 text. Schmidt admits the presence of a conservative element in which Luther retains a basically medieval description of the hypostatic union. In making this concession, Schmidt inadvertently controverts the validity of Schwarz's interpretation of the disputation, as described above. In addition to

⁸⁶This interpretation, namely, that Luther's complaint against the Sorbonne statement arises *because he accepts suppositional carrying*, and not because he rejects it, is collaborated by other sections of the recorded debate, and is reflected in versions 'A' and 'B' as well as the quote from the 'C' version provided above. See, for example, WA 39/II, 16a. "Ego capio hominem dupliciter uno modo pro substantia corporali per se subsistente, alio modo pro persona divina sustentante humanitatem. Est hoc, quaeso, theologiam et philosophiam conciliare, cum distinguis, imo hoc ipso, quod univoca distinguifices?" Luther also cites scholastic christological distinctions as evidence against the argument that 'man' is applied to God univocally. See WA 39/II, 10b.

the ‘conservative element’, however, Schmidt also isolates a ‘progressive’ strand in Luther’s argument, which contradicts his apparent traditionalism. This strand is visible, Schmidt insists, in Luther’s analysis of syllogisms within the disputation. Here we find an unresolved fissure between theology and philosophy, which Schmidt identifies as the source of Luther’s doctrinal idiosyncrasies.⁸⁷

Whereas late medieval thinkers customarily refute heretical syllogisms through an analysis of premises, Luther appears in this disputation simply to discard the validity of syllogistic reasoning altogether. Schmidt concludes from this approach that Luther understands the doctrine of the incarnation simply to *contradict* philosophical reason, thus yielding, as it were, a double account of truth. Christologically speaking, the result of all this is to forfeit any need for a distinction between persons and natures, since this differentiated analysis (once introduced in order to bypass philosophical contradiction) is no longer necessary. In any case, even if this distinction were desired by Luther, his antipathy towards even a ministerial role of philosophically derived distinctions would bar its actual use. Thus, Luther is forced simply to assert a dialectical union of man and God in a way that contravenes reason. Thus, although Luther *tries* to speak like a late medieval theologian in certain respects, his antipathy towards philosophy introduces a bifurcation of thought that bears doctrinal fruit in an aggregate doctrine of Christ’s Person.

Schmidt’s appraisal of the 1539 disputation suffers, though, from a number of exegetical deficiencies. Perhaps most glaring: the entire trajectory of his interpretation depends upon the fact that, while it concedes Luther explicitly to assert one thing to be

⁸⁷For Schmidt’s argument to this effect, see Axel Schmidt, *Die Christologie in Martin Luthers späten Disputationen*, 202-10; 220-27. For the language of a progressive versus conservative strain, see 201; 283-4.

true (suppositional carrying/ distinction between person and nature), it must make the case that the ancillary discursive furniture of Luther's argument implicitly proscribes his doing so. In other words, it is a construal that depends on adjudicating what Luther *must* be saying, at the direct expense of what Luther actually *says*. He overstates, for instance, the extent to which Luther's analysis of syllogism unambiguously denotes a wholesale rejection of philosophical reasoning within theology. Reijo Työrinoja, for instance, argues that the way in which Luther arbitrates syllogistic legitimacy within the theological sphere continues to reflect standard late medieval practice.⁸⁸

Whether or not Työrinoja's interpretation turns out finally to be convincing is not a question we have space to arbitrate here. However, does it not seem far preferable to interpret Luther's intent in a way that comports with his affirmation of suppositional carrying elsewhere in the disputation rather than postulate the existence of two radically incongruent trajectories of christological discourse within the same text? Schmidt's 'solution' in other words, can count only as an exegetical avenue of last resort. The exegesis on which his view depends succeeds only by destroying the coherency of the text itself; that is, by presuming within it the existence of an irresolvable fracture of meaning. Ironically, adopting this approach violates a principle of reasoning famously defended by the very thinkers whose Christology Schmidt thinks Luther rejects, namely, that "plurality should not be posited without necessity."⁸⁹

⁸⁸See the discussion in Reijo Työrinoja, "Proprietas Verbi", 143-78. For a helpful discussion of the artificial way in which Luther's view of philosophy has been polarized in much recent scholarship, see Christine Helmer, *The Trinity and Martin Luther*, 50-56.

⁸⁹See the reference to this phrase in Armand Augustine Maurer, *The Philosophy of William of Ockham in the Light of Its Principles* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999): 51 n. 116.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, we observed the fact that each of the major advocates of divergence acknowledge there to be texts in Luther's corpus, both early and late, that express at least superficial acquiescence to the language of suppositional carrying.⁹⁰ Despite the fact that this concession plausibly implies an ongoing acceptance of suppositional carrying as an explanation of the hypostatic union, advocates of the divergence thesis argue rather forcefully that Luther, in fact, decisively rejects this account in favor of a 'composite' doctrine of Christ. They advance this argument on the basis of the following interpretive claims:

1. Luther explicitly rejects suppositional carrying as 'monstrous' in his 1540 "Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ".
2. Luther clearly utilizes compositional descriptive vocabulary, which reflects an irreducibly different doctrine of Christ's Person than the one endorsed in late medieval Christology.
3. Luther asserts a degree of unity between divinity and humanity in Christ not possible for the doctrine of suppositional carrying to secure.
4. Luther's 1539 "Disputation Concerning the Passage: 'The Word Was Made Flesh'" establishes a rejection of suppositional carrying either: 1) by deriding this doctrine as an equivocal affirmation of the incarnation (Schwarz); or 2) by creating an antithetical relation between philosophy and theology to the extent that the distinction between person and nature is effectively destroyed (Schmidt).

In the course of this section's discussion, we have suggested that each of these claims fails as a valid interpretation of the pertinent textual data. The context of the comments in the 1540 disputation demonstrate Luther's focus to be upon the unintended consequences of semantic assertions he otherwise accepts to be valid, a point reinforced

⁹⁰Reinhard Schwarz, "Gott ist Mensch", 305; 335-6 n. 156; Theobald Beer, *Der fröhliche Wechsel und Streit*, 406; and Axel Schmidt, *Die Christologie in Martin Luthers späten Disputationen*, 234-5; 241-3.

by the fact that the theses directly preceding those in question express primary concern about the implication of Christ being a composite being. The compositional language that Luther *does* invoke elsewhere falls well within the ordinary parameters of medieval discourse, and thus fails as clear evidence for any dramatic divergence. Similarly ambiguous are the various places in Luther's writing where he registers a robust affirmation of the union between God and man in Christ. Claims of this kind can count as evidence of divergence only once it is assumed that similar expressions of unity are simply impossible within a late medieval christological framework; an assumption belied by the *actual* christological discourse of the period. Finally, the 1539 disputation's central complaint against the Sorbonne's implicitly equivocal position is sustained, not by Luther's underlying rejection of suppositional carrying, but by his continuing assumption that this mode of christological explanation is normative; a fact made rather clear by Luther's designation of the 'man' Christ as a "*persona divina sustentante humanitatem*".⁹¹ Since all of this evidence lacks demonstrative force, we must accept the transparent indications elsewhere in Luther's writing that he continues to affirm the doctrine of suppositional carrying, and reject the argument that this verbal assent is merely illusory in nature.

⁹¹WA 39/II, 16a.

THE SUFFERING OF GOD IN CHRIST: A 16TH CENTURY BREAKTHROUGH?

The present chapter focuses on the second aspect of the divergence thesis' first tier of analysis. The issue directly in question throughout is Martin Luther's conception of God's participation in the sufferings of Christ. A specific understanding of this conception is crucially important to the divergence thesis as a whole. The bulk of emphasis in recent literature pertinent to this area falls squarely upon the reformer's allegedly 'unique' treatment of the communication of idioms. The uniqueness of Luther's position is purported in this literature to consist in his forthright endorsement of a 'reciprocal exchange' between Christ's natures within which there is not just a participation of the humanity in divine attributes, but *also* a participation of Christ's divinity in *human* characteristics, including a direct experience of its suffering. This second communicative 'direction' (that is, the translation of human properties to divinity) is the conceptual lynchpin of the divergence thesis as a whole. What may seem initially to be only a small and therefore inconsequential conceptual adjustment turns out to be, as it were, the modern camel poking its nose beneath the medieval theological tent. For once the predication asymmetry characteristic of a classical understanding of the *communicatio idiomatum* is destabilized, an entire constellation of theological assumptions appears ripe for reformulation.

First to go is obviously the doctrine of divine impassibility itself, which Luther's position is alleged unequivocally to jettison. This preliminary course correction, however, is but one small part of a much more profound recalibration, which theoretically recasts the nature of God's relationship to the world. This 'recalibration' is precisely the doctrinal dividend advocates of the divergence reception generally understand Luther's

christological adjustment to enable. Because of this christological adjustment, Luther is supposed to clear away space for a more adequate conceptualization of God's immanent involvement within the created order. The legitimacy of this 'reception' depends rather directly upon the interpretive judgment that Luther's doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* includes a participation of the divine *nature* in the sufferings of Christ's humanity.

As the result of this argumentative structure, the primary intent of this second christological chapter is to ascertain whether or not Luther does, in fact, predicate 'suffering' of the divine *nature* of Christ, as divergence advocates are so wont to insist. In order to address this question, the subsequent discussion focuses its attention upon historical texts in which Luther's direct treatment of the *communicatio idiomatum* occupies center stage. At the outset, we must clarify and acknowledge the fact that Luther's understanding of the communication of attributes differs in at least one respect from many patristic and medieval antecedents.¹ For scholastic thinkers of the medieval period, the *communicatio idiomatum* refers primarily if not exclusively to the predication of divine and human attributes *to the single Person of Christ*. Luther often describes the communication of idioms along these traditional lines, but there are *also* places where he introduces a second application. In these contexts, the *communicatio idiomatum* also describes the participation of Christ's human nature in predicates that belong properly to His divine nature. This much is abundantly clear from Luther's occasional argument for

¹Whether or not there exists significant patristic precedent for Luther's point of view is not a question that may detain us here. Certainly, there are many patristic theologians who envision a divinization of Christ's humanity, which takes place as the result of communicative exchange. It remains a question for future study whether and how these precursors might relate to Luther's own view, developed hundreds of years later within a different intellectual context.

the possibility of Christ's real presence in the Lord's Supper on the grounds that the humanity of Christ shares in divine omnipresence.²

The question this chapter addresses is not *whether* Luther occasionally interprets the communication of idioms as a sharing between Christ's two natures, but whether this sharing is presented by him as '*bi-directional*'. Is there, along with the human nature's participation in the divine majesty also a real participation of Christ's divinity in the suffering vulnerability of His humanity? Theologically speaking, a great deal hinges upon the arbitration of this question. In terms of Luther's relation to his context, one may note the fact that, although his endorsement of a divine to human communication of attributes is admittedly somewhat 'unique' against the backdrop of medieval christological opinion, this view by itself need not destabilize the classically developed doctrine of God. There is nothing outrageously controversial about Luther's assumption that the human nature of Christ is both passible and *mutable*. In this sense, the idea that Christ's humanity could be 'altered' or 'elevated' in some respects through the hypostatic union does not fall prey to the same theological and philosophical restrictions that apply in the case of the divine nature. To speak of an ontologically conditioning participation of the humanity in the majesty of God initiates no essential contradictions so far as longstanding conceptions of 'human nature' are concerned.³

²For a thorough discussion of ubiquity, see Jörg Bauer, "Ubiquität", in *Creator est Creatura: Luther's Christologie als Lehre von der Idiomenkommunikation*, hrsg. Oswald Bayer und Benjamin Gleede, Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann, bd. 138 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 186-301. The capacity of Christ's human nature to be in more than one place at the same time is not the only application of this communicative principle in Luther's Christology, even if confessional debates later in the 16th century tended to focus in upon it. The present survey accepts this aspect of Luther's Christology, but will not expend additional space seeking either to verify or expand upon its degree of importance within Luther's theology as a whole. The following chapter will, however, reflect upon the soteriological significance of a 'one-way' communication of attributes between natures.

³That is, insofar as this 'ontological conditioning' avoids the implication that Christ's genuine humanity is somehow dissolved or transformed through metamorphosis into something other than really

To speak of an ontologically conditioning participation of divinity in the death and suffering of humanity, however, initiates an essential contradiction to longstanding conceptions of divinity. That is, a *two-way* rendering of the communication of idioms requires as its direct entailment the severing of a number of conceptual moorings basically intrinsic to the classically developed doctrine of God, a point already outlined earlier in this chapter. The salient question for this part of the chapter is whether Luther endorses, in addition to his ordinary analysis of the *communicatio idiomatum* as a reference to the mutual application of predicates to the single Person of Christ, a one-way, or two-way doctrine of communicative sharing between Christ's humanity and divinity. In what follows, I will argue that Luther clearly endorses a '*one-way*' communication of attributes, a position that he makes rather clear by his unwavering proviso that the divine nature does not, and indeed *can not* suffer.⁴

human. Luther clearly rejects such a view, predominantly in his complaints against the radical reformer Caspar Schwenckfeld in his 1540 "Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ." There are important precedents, moreover, in both patristic and medieval contexts, for christological views that exploit the mutability of Christ's humanity and do so without any implication that Christ ceases thereby to be human in any sense. For the patristic period, see the description of Gregory of Nyssa's "transformational Christology" in John Behr, *The Nicene Faith: Part 2, Formation of Christian Theology*, vol. 2 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), 436-51. In the medieval period, at least Johannes of Mirecourt is willing to entertain the possibility of a human body being present in more than one place at a time. He advances this possibility not on the basis of the communication of idioms, but through recourse to the *potential absoluta Dei*. The very fact that such a thing is viewed as possible, though, shows that spatial circumscription is not viewed to be as essential to human nature as, for instance, impassibility is to the divine nature. Even in their most wildly speculative moments, the nominalist theologians do not suggest that it would ever be possible for *divinity* to suffer. Ernst Borchert, *Der Einfluss des Nominalismus auf die Christologie der Spätscholastik*, 84. It also seems fair to say that any christologically oriented doctrine of divinization entails some form of intrinsic human mutability. This at least would seem necessary if there is truly to be a genuine participation of human beings in the majesty and splendor of divine nature.

⁴This view will be shown in subsequent chapters to possess important implications for characterizing the basic shape of Luther's soteriological vision. It will also be deemed rather important for the task of responsibly appropriating Luther's christological witness in a contemporary theological context. In addition to the fundamental concern of this section to specify Luther's understanding of divine suffering, however, we must also acknowledge the subsidiary purpose of this investigation to corroborate the thesis already advanced that Luther retains a medieval doctrine of suppositional carrying as the underlying metaphysic through which he makes sense of the hypostatic union. This corroboration is possible, because the nature of Luther's predication theory provides a crucial insight into the conceptual sub-structure of his doctrine of Christ. His analysis of various 'predicates' provides, as it were, a looking glass into the way in

Contracting the Sphere of Inquiry

Before turning to a nuanced examination of the pertinent christological texts this section begins by narrowing the sphere of investigation. Unlike the relative scarcity of texts in which Luther specifically addresses the doctrine of suppositional carrying, the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* is one to which the reformer turns rather often throughout the course of his lifetime.⁵ It would be inadvisable for this chapter to attempt a comprehensive synthesis of Luther's position as expressed in these texts. The focus of what follows is restricted, more narrowly, to those texts that pertain either directly or indirectly to Luther's understanding of the relation between the divine nature of Christ and its mode of participation in human sufferings.⁶

Even within this smaller grouping of texts it is possible to isolate a few texts in particular, and direct primary exegetical attention to them. This is because most divergence interpreters of Luther's Christology concede the significant fact that broad swaths of the reformer's writings retain a thoroughly traditional point of view regarding the suffering of God in Christ. Dennis Ngien, for instance, furnishes an impressive series of texts from Luther's corpus in which any communication of human predicates to the

which the reformer conceptualizes the hypostatic union. The importance of this fact, for our purposes, is that it affords an opportunity to test part I's claims vis-à-vis Luther's retention of the doctrine of suppositional carrying. In particular, we may test the previously advanced contention that Luther continues to assume an 'asymmetrical' doctrine of Christ's Person by measuring the extent to which such a view is manifest in a similarly asymmetrical predication structure. Does Luther distinguish, in other words, the application of divine and human attributes through a clearly differentiated mode of analysis? Although the abiding focus of this section will fall upon the first and primary objective, namely, triangulating Luther's precise views of divine suffering, the discussion in it will also furnish additional evidence in support of the claims advanced in part I.

⁵The frequency of these references has prompted a handful of scholars to characterize the *communicatio idiomatum* as the governing nerve center of Luther's theology.

⁶Indirect evidence includes, for instance, any text in which Luther specifies the precise way in which the predicates of Christ's humanity are applied to Christ as compared with the predicates of His divinity.

divine nature is specifically prohibited.⁷ Marc Lienhard is a bit less forthright perhaps, but nevertheless grants the existence of a ‘traditional strain’, especially in a number of Luther’s early writings.⁸

Acknowledging these ‘impassibilist texts’ to exist constrains the advocates of a divergence interpretation to one of two hermeneutical options. Either the existence of a gradual chronological development must be superimposed upon Luther’s writing, in which he incrementally moves beyond the christological proscriptions of his medieval past, *or* one must acknowledge a fundamental and unresolved inconsistency within Luther’s written corpus. It could also be argued that that the implicit trajectory of Luther’s theological vision points in the direction of a radically new understanding of divine suffering, but fails to articulate this understanding with a satisfying degree of consistency.⁹

The divergence interpretation simply cannot claim that Luther *comprehensively* overturns a traditional understanding of divine suffering and espouses a two-way communication of attributes with unwavering constancy. It must argue, instead, that

⁷See the various citations provided in Dennis Ngien, “Chalcedonian Christology and Beyond”, 54-8. Ngien concedes not only that Luther retains the traditional view, but does so at least as late as 1544, the year before he died.

⁸See, for instance, Marc Lienhard, *Luther, Witness to Jesus Christ: Stages and Themes of the Reformer’s Christology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1982), 169-71.

⁹ Along these lines, it is sometimes suggested that Luther and his Protestant followers, were motivated politically to stress their continuity with catholic doctrine in order to preserve some measure of religious toleration in the eyes of their Roman Catholic superiors such as the emperor Charles V. In this sense, Luther’s own claim in his Schmalkald articles to share his opponents doctrine of God and Christology is seen as a disingenuous, though perhaps necessary product of political savvy. Thus, Luther’s significance is measured not so much in light of his actual theological proposal, but in terms of the grander conceptual elaborations this proposal is perceived to have enabled. Luther is understood to be among the first to poke his head above the clouds of the late medieval christological fog, but the limitations of his own historical circumstances cause him, as it were, to bob continually above and below—never breaking through into a consistent articulation of his own best insights. One of the earliest interpreters of Luther to argue this point is Albrecht Ritschl, who complains that Luther and Melancthon both fall back into a scholastic mode of theology which Ritschl understands to be a dead end. For more on this, see chapter 4.

Luther's clear endorsement of a two-way doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* in a few textual *loci* justify the larger conclusion that Luther effectively disrupts the classical doctrine of God by insisting upon the suffering of the divine nature in Christ, even though this position is not articulated with even consistency throughout his theological writings. As in the previous section's discussion of Luther's relation to suppositional carrying, this argument succeeds by assigning hermeneutical pride of place to a circumscribed canon of texts within a larger assortment of otherwise variegated evidence.

The pertinence of this brief taxonomical survey to the present section's central argument is again methodological in nature. In light of the argumentative form assumed by a divergence interpretation of Luther's doctrine of the communication of attributes, there emerge two available avenues for pursuing its refutation. The first, and weaker of the two, would be to challenge the hermeneutical arbitration of the two alleged 'sets' of texts within Luther's writing, and suggest a divergence resolution of the tensions between them to be inadequate.¹⁰ More incisive is the second avenue of criticism, which will be pursued in this section's forthcoming discussion. This avenue denies that the evidence is really mixed at all by demonstrating that even the texts considered by divergence interpreters to contain Luther's clearest articulations of a two-way communication of attributes still reflect a traditional commitment to divine impassibility. By refuting the passibilism often assigned to these texts, this chapter will thus excise the sole evidentiary

¹⁰That is to say, even if the select number of texts that divergence advocates enlist *do* contain language that expresses a two-way communication of attributes, this alone does not explain how interpreters are justified in according to these texts determinative weight for establishing where Luther's basic theological predilections lie. It seems to the present author that some discussion of the warrant behind this hermeneutical shift is needed. Would it not be at least as feasible to interpret these few texts in light of the many others that express clearly an alternative point of view? We will not pursue these questions at great length in the discussion that follows. Instead, we will seek to demonstrate the more devastating point that even the select texts that seem to express a divergence point of view do not actually do so.

warrant for a divergence rendering of these matters in the first place. The methodological structure of this counter-argument will therefore not require a redundant documentation of texts in which Luther is already acknowledged by scholars on all sides to espouse merely a one-way doctrine of the communication of attributes. Such documentation would be superfluous, since the most responsible forms of the divergence interpretation are advanced in full cognizance of these texts. Instead, the main body of text will occupy itself with loci in which Luther is alleged unambiguously to express a two-way understanding of communicative exchange.

Dispensing a Few, Prominent Evidentiary Non-Sequiturs

Some of the texts adduced as evidence of a new, passibilist element in Luther's doctrine of the communication of attributes can be refuted only by means of careful and prolonged exegetical argument.¹¹ The probative value of many other texts commonly cited, however, dissipates with relative ease. Foremost among the latter are instances in which Luther directly affirms some version of the statement that, in Christ, "God suffers." Paul Althaus, for instance, points to a text from Luther's 1540 "Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ" which states: "What Christ has suffered should also be attributed to God for they are one."¹² According to Althaus' assessment, this text conveys a commitment on Luther's part to dei-passionism, and thus entails a departure from the traditional doctrine of divine impassibility.¹³ Althaus is not at all unique in his

¹¹These instances occupy the focus of the following section.

¹² Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 197 n. 44. Althaus quotes here from WA 39/II, 121.

¹³By this term, Althaus means to differentiate Luther from the early church heresy of 'patripassionism', since Luther asserts only the suffering of the divine *Son*, and not the Father as well. This distinction appears rather frequently in the explanation of Luther's commitment to divine passibility.

attempt to draw such a conclusion.¹⁴ The initial plausibility of his interpretation melts away, however, under the heat of closer scrutiny.

A ‘dei-passionist interpretation’ of texts like the one Althaus cites is deficient because it wrongly assumes that the mere application of human attributes to ‘God’ automatically disrupts the conceptual landscape of patristic and medieval discourse. The inaccuracy of this assumption is easily demonstrated. Many precedents for the operative ascriptive practice are detectable in the history of theological development prior to Luther. Perhaps most conspicuous in this regard is the well-known Chalcedonian endorsement of the Marian term Θεοτόκος (bearer of God), a designation that unambiguously stipulates the application of human predicates not just to ‘Christ’, but to ‘God’ as well.¹⁵ Although the history of subsequent theological development is circuitous, it bears observing here that this basic predication trajectory would later be explicated in the more blatant claims of canon 10 of Constantinople II (553) which insists that one of the Trinity has suffered for us.¹⁶ Those patristic thinkers who endorse statements of this kind, it bears clarifying, intend no implicit rejection of divine impassibility. Cyril of Alexandria, for instance, whose vitriolic exchanges with Nestorius were part of the impetus eventually leading to the chalcedonian definition, was quite clear

¹⁴ See, for instance, Bernard Lohse, *Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 230.

¹⁵ Richard Price and Michael Gaddis, *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*, vol. 3, Translated Texts for Historians, 45 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), 179-80.

¹⁶ Gilles Emery, OP, “The Immutability of the God of Love and the Problem of Language Concerning the ‘Suffering of God’”, in *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering*, eds. Keating, James, and Thomas Joseph White (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2009), 31.

about his abiding commitment to this doctrine, even as he insisted upon the legitimacy and necessity of theological statements such as “God suffers.”¹⁷

Medieval authors also endorse this mode of predication. Scholars who emphasize the obvious centrality of the *communicatio idiomatum* in Luther’s theology, have sometimes failed to reflect adequately upon the extent to which this centrality is itself likely a product of the late medieval environment in which the reformer was educated, rather than an innovation of his own fabrication. Fourteenth century theological discussion, in particular, is rife with interest and rigorous debate over the theory and practice of christological predication.¹⁸ Insufficient emphasis upon, or awareness of the intellectual milieu stretching especially between the 14th and 16th centuries has sometimes led scholars to assign an inordinate degree of novelty to aspects of Luther’s christological discourse that are, in fact, rather prosaic once situated in the framework of a late medieval setting.

Robert Kolb, for instance, avers that Luther’s affirmation of christological doctrine introduces “dramatically non-traditional expressions”, such as: “‘Mary makes broth for God,’ Mary suckles God with her breasts, bathes God, rocks and carries God,

¹⁷For a thorough treatment of Cyril’s Christology, see John McGuckin, *Saint Cyril of Alexandria and the Christological Controversy*, 175-226. See also Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought*, The Oxford Early Christian studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 135-71.

¹⁸A dated, but still invaluable window into the complexities of this discourse is available in Ernst Borchert, *Der Einfluss des Nominalismus auf die Christologie der Spätscholastik nach dem Traktat "de communicatione idiomatum" des Nicolaus Oresme*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters 35, 4/5 (Münster i. W. 1940). Awareness of this 14th and 15th century literature makes the ordinary custom of introducing Luther’s Christology predominantly in relation to 5th century debates between Cyril and Nestorius appear historically unhelpful. To be sure, Luther is aware of these patristic debates, but his own point of access into the doctrine of Christ is the late medieval setting in which he lived and breathed. Thus, the practice of referring to Luther as Cyrillian or hyper-Alexandrian, while perhaps illuminating in some respects, represents a historically tendentious mode of classification. Luther’s textual valorization of Cyril and denigration of Nestorius and Eutyches in such texts as his 1539 “On the Councils and the Church” is far from unique within the medieval period.

and Pilate and Herod crucified and killed God, ‘the infant Christ, lying in the cradle, suckled by the Virgin Mary, created heaven and earth’”.¹⁹ How exactly the ‘non-traditional’ character of such statements ought to be situated, is not something Kolb neatly specifies for his reader. In the context of his main argument, the emphasis seems to fall upon the fact that Luther appropriates a broadly traditional (that is, patristic) Christology, but does so through creative and, non-traditional vocabulary. Thus, Kolb emphasizes the conceptual continuity Luther’s statements have with the Council of Ephesus’ much earlier affirmation that God lay in Mary’s womb.²⁰ A few pages later, however, Kolb argues that, for Luther, the divine nature shares in attributes of the human nature, thus registering his ostensible assent to a two-way understanding of the *communicatio idiomatum*.²¹ The overall thrust in Kolb seems to be upon Luther’s unique emphasis upon the radical union between God and man in Christ.²² The dramatic novelty he attributes to Luther’s speech, though, could certainly be taken to suggest the introduction of a foreign element in Luther’s appropriation of the tradition.

Such an implication is pursued less ambiguously, for instance, in the recent work of Johann Anselm Steiger. He calls attention to similar statements in Luther’s writings, gleaned, in his case, from the reformer’s 1539 treatise “On the Councils and the Church” and also from a sermon preached in December of 1525. Of these texts, Steiger remarks:

¹⁹This amalgamation of quotes provided in Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 112. See the appropriate citations to Luther’s texts in note 18. It is somewhat unclear how Kolb situates the significance of this quote.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 112-3.

²¹*Ibid.*, 115.

²²Kolb leans rather heavily upon Lienhard’s construal of Luther’s Christology throughout his discussion. Whether or not he shares Lienhard’s understanding of Luther’s new ontology of Christ’s Person, and fundamental trajectory beyond divine impassibility is not discussed explicitly. See *ibid.*, 110 n. 4; 111 n. 5 and n. 11; 112 n. 14; 113 n. 21; 115 n. 32; 116 n. 35, 36 and 40; 117 n. 43.

“Since, on the basis of the *communicatio idiomatum*, all things that apply to the human nature of Christ are also applied to the divine nature, Luther can preach that the Creator was born (*nascitur creator*) and that the Word of God lay in a manger”.²³ One notes in this statement that Steiger *equates* the attribution of human predicates *to God* in Luther’s discourse with an attribution of suffering *to the divine nature*. Because of this ‘semantic equation’, he identifies in such ascriptions an implicit conceptual swerve away from the previously normative tendency to regulate the *communicatio idiomatum* with an underlying, axiomatic commitment to divine impassibility.²⁴ Steiger’s semantic equation appears not only logically premature, but altogether unlikely, once the linguistic complexities of late medieval discourse are taken into account.²⁵ Allegations like those he advances depend upon the validity of two rather tenuous assumptions: 1) that the blatant ascription of human predicates *to God* is clearly *novel* when compared with the ordinary patterns of late medieval christological discourse; and 2) that this mode of

²³Johann Anselm Steiger, “Die communicatio idiomatum als Achse und Motor der Theologie Luthers”, 4. “Da aufgrund der communicatio idiomatum alle Dinge, die von der menschlichen Natur Christi gelten, auch seiner göttlichen zugeeignet werden, kann Luther predigen, daß der Schöpfer geboren wird (>nascitur creator<) und daß das verbum Dei in der Krippe liegt.” The English translation provided above is taken from Johann Anselm Steiger, “The Communicatio Idiomatum as the Axle and Motor of Luther’s Theology”, trans. Carolyn Schneider, *Lutheran Quarterly* 14 (2000): 127.

²⁴Steiger provides an example of this ‘regulation’ in the work of John of Damascus who occasionally speaks *as if* there were a fully reciprocal exchange of attributes between natures, but proscribed this possibility through his ongoing commitment to divine impassibility. Luther’s unflinching ascription of human predicates *to God* indicates, for Steiger, that Luther fundamentally rejects this inconsistency. “Ganz anders jedoch Luther.” He does not address, however, whether or not Luther similarly proscribes the suffering of the divine nature as we shall in fact argue in what follows. Johann Anselm Steiger, “Die communicatio idiomatum als Achse und Motor der Theologie Luthers”, 3-4.

²⁵By ‘semantic equation’, I refer to Steiger’s evident assumption that ‘the Creator is born’ is simply equivalent to ‘the divine nature is born’; or that ‘God suffers’ entails ‘the divine nature suffers’. To assume this semantic equation is to overlook the thorough and meticulous ways in which theology since the patristic period has distinguished these two types of claims. In light of this tradition, of which Steiger is undoubtedly aware, one is forced to ask why a statement that can just as easily be found among patristic or medieval proponents of divine impassibility ought to be enlisted as clear evidence of an entirely different meaning when found in Luther.

ascription reflects an intrinsic endorsement of divine passibility.²⁶ Structurally, the second of this pair (doctrinal deviation) draws its exegetical plausibility entirely from the presupposed validity of the first (novelty). If Luther's statements are shown *not* to be novel when compared with the ordinary discourse of late medieval christology, the notion that he intends by them to express a fundamentally 'new' doctrinal content loses its evidentiary point of departure. The plausibility of a divergence interpretation of this textual data erodes, then, if it can be demonstrated that antecedent equivalents for this sort of language exist in the theological milieu of Luther's immediate theological context.

A few examples of late medieval discourse demonstrate rather easily the prevalence with which blatantly human predicates are assigned to God because of the hypostatic union. Petrus of Palude (c. 1275-1342), for instance, affirms that, in Christ, God “sees”, “eats” and “suffers.”²⁷ Robert Holcot (c. 1290-1349) claims, a bit more controversially perhaps, that one may say that God can be deceived or even die, on account of the humanity of Christ.²⁸ In a similar vein, Heinrich Totting of Oyta (c. 1330-1397) insists that the actions and sufferings of the humanity must apply to the divine suppositum on account of the *communicatio idiomatum*. On this basis, he affirms that “God suffered, died and moved about spatially.”²⁹ Nicholas Oresme (1323-1382) assents to a similar point of view, stating that, in Christ, *God* is born of the virgin, suffers, and

²⁶These sorts of statements also have significant patristic precedent, though that falls outside the immediate scope of this chapter.

²⁷Ernst Borchert, *Der Einfluss des Nominalismus auf die Christologie der Spätscholastik*, 79.

²⁸Ibid., 85. Adam Wodeham (c. 1295-1358) likewise affirms the statement that “God died”, although specifies the sense in which this is true. For him, this statement signifies that the human body with which the divine hypostasis is joined dies. The salient point, then, as we shall discuss below, is not whether such statements are affirmed, but *how* they are affirmed. In this case, the qualificatory discourse is essential for apprehending the meaning behind the assertion in question. Ibid., 86.

²⁹Ibid., 96. Michael Aiguanis also affirms the statement: “A creature bore the creator.” Ibid., 87.

dies.³⁰ Luther's own exposure to the peculiarities of this late medieval semantic analysis is a function of his scholastic training, in which he perused and commented upon several authors whose work reflects similar patterns of predication application. William of Ockham (c. 1287-1347), for instance, explains that the Son of God is incarnate, died, and suffered, and likewise that a 'man created the stars'.³¹ Gabriel Biel (c. 1420-1495) advances a similarly direct application of human predicates to 'God'. In his commentary on the third book of Lombard's *Sententiae*, for instance, he asserts that, in Christ, "God is temporal, corruptible, passible, mortal, etc", and that *man* is "God, eternal, infinite creator, etc"³².

This brief survey dispossesses Luther's aforementioned christological statements of the apparent novelty, upon which many arguments in favor of the divergence thesis depend.³³ Although it may be the case that Luther exercises some degree of unique

³⁰Ibid., 110.

³¹Marilyn McCord Adams, "Relations, Inherence, and Subsistence", 68. Here in Ockham's statement we see the way in which the limits of the *communicatio idiomatum* are tested also by applying divine attributes or actions to Christ understood as a human being or as 'man'.

³²Text cited in Ernst Borchert, *Der Einfluss des Nominalismus auf die Christologie der Spätscholastik*, 151. "Exemplum primi, ut quod concretum divine nature, scilicet deus, predicator de concreto humane nature scilicet homo, et e converso, dicendo, homo est deus, deus est homo, homo est eternus, infinitus creator, etc. Deus est temporalis, corruptibilis, passibilis, mortalis, etc. Exemplum secundi, Christus est deus, Christus est homo, etc. Dicitur notanter concretorum, quia abstracta naturam non predicantur de se invicem." Important here is Biel's distinction between abstract and concrete statements. A great deal hinges, so far as the topic of this dissertation is concerned, upon how exactly Luther makes use of this distinction, and whether he actually vests it with his own new meaning. For further discussion of this important text from Biel, see below.

³³One example of how this presumed novelty functions in the context of theological argument appears in Eberhard Jüngel's essay "Vom Tod des lebendigen Gottes: ein Plakat." *Zeitschrift Für Theologie Und Kirche* 65, no. 1 (January 1, 1968): 93-116. Jüngel detects major christological shifts at work in Luther's disagreement with Zwingli over the real presence of Christ in the eucharist. On pages 103-4, he turns his attention specifically to the *communicatio idiomatum* and comments. "Später trägt Luther seine Lehre von der *communicatio idiomatum* noch pointierter vor und weiß sich mit ihr von der Tradition (Zwingli und der Scholastik) geschieden: »Hoc idem est, quod no dicimus: *communicatio idiomatum*.« »Hoc idem«--das ist die Behauptung, das Wort »Mensch« bezeichne den Gottessohn oder die göttliche Person. Und entsprechend kann es nun heißen: »Vere dicitur: Iste homo creavit mundum et Deus iste est passus, mortuus, sepultus etc.« So wird die Rede vom Tode Gottes möglich". The great irony of this last

creativity in doing so, his application of human attributes directly to *God* is not at all unusual once framed in relation to the late medieval scholastic context with which he was familiar. This fact is rather important, because the vast majority of scholars who find in Luther a ‘clear’ endorsement of divine passibility, do so on the basis of texts that advance instances of such application. Because Luther does not wince away from the statement that ‘God suffers’ but actually *insists* upon it, many interpreters assume that he *must* implicitly be criticizing the patristic and medieval doctrine of divine impassibility. Such an assumption depends, however, upon the presumption that the insistence itself introduces some kind of fundamental novelty, which it clearly does not. If Luther’s comments lack novelty, as this section has demonstrated, then it must be concluded that the attempt to enlist them as evidence of christological divergence is completely unwarranted. It simply does not follow that, because Luther endorses statements such as “God suffers”, “God lies in a manger”, or the like, that he therefore reorders the *communicatio idiomatum* to include the suffering of the divine nature. Recognition of this fact, in effect, strips the divergence reading of its most frequently cited evidence.³⁴

At the Root of the Issue: Modes of Christological Qualification

In the late medieval period, christological statements of the variety discussed in the previous section are almost always accompanied by a highly refined qualificatory semantics. This discourse is intended to specify a given statement’s licit theological

observation is the fact that Jüngel’s cited examples are not *at all* unusual for medieval christological discourse. It is *because of his exposure to medieval texts* that Luther affirms of Christ that “this man created the stars”, and “this God died and was buried”. The dispossession of novelty severely mitigates the viability of Jüngel’s reception of Luther’s significance, which he develops in the remainder of the essay.

³⁴These statements are the most frequently cited, but the real strength of the divergence argument lies elsewhere.

sense, and thereby exclude any number of possible linguistic connotations whose meaning the author deems improper for one reason or another. For example, although many medieval theologians affirm the validity of the statement that ‘God suffers’, this affirmation is qualified in such a way so as to protect and maintain the enduring impassibility and immutability of the divine nature as such.³⁵ The real question then, so far as Luther’s understanding of divine suffering is concerned, is *not* whether Luther ever applies human predicates to ‘God’ (for many in the medieval period do the same), but whether he blatantly forgoes, modifies or explicitly rejects the late medieval qualificatory discourse through which the impassibility of the divine nature is traditionally protected. To what extent, in other words, does Luther imbibe and manifest the characteristic qualifications and semantic provisos through which scholastic authors register their ongoing commitment to divine impassibility?

Although the majority of textual evidence adduced to prove Luther’s rejection of these qualifications consists of predicate applications proved in the last section to lack demonstrative force, there are a handful of additional texts also utilized by advocates of the divergence thesis that warrant further consideration. Dennis Ngien, for instance, points to a sermon on the Gospel of John preached in 1537, in which Luther states: “the two natures dwell in the Lord Christ, and yet He is but one person. These two natures retain their properties, and each also communicates its properties to the other”.³⁶ Here we have a genuine instance in which Luther’s *language* appears to exceed the scope of

³⁵See the preliminary discussion of these qualifications in the opening section of this chapter’s first part.

³⁶LW 22, 491-2. Quoted in Dennis Ngien, “Chalcedonian Christology and Beyond”, 59. The original text for this sermon is to be found in WA 47, 199. “Jhr wisset, das do sej die Communicatio Idiomatum, das in dem herrn Christo sein zweierlej natur und doch nur eine Person, und das diese zwo naturen furen und behalten, ja mit einander teilen ire eigenschafften.”

patristic and medieval semantic parameters. By suggesting that each nature communicates its own peculiar properties to its counterpart, Luther seems to commit himself to a two-way doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*; a view that would naturally include, by extension, his assent to a sharing of Christ's divinity in the sufferings of His humanity. Texts to a similar effect are identified by Ngien also in Luther's 1540 "Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ", as well as in a late installment of Luther's *Table Talk*.³⁷ Because Ngien's treatment of these texts is most specific and extensive, the following discussion will focus upon his exegesis as representative of the divergence reading in its clearest and most concentrated form.

Ngien's interpretation possesses an undeniable *prima facie* legitimacy, at least so far as the 1537 text from Luther's sermon on John is concerned. To be sure, the possibility for alternative exegetical renderings has sometimes been clouded by an excessive predisposition towards the identification of disruptive novelty in Luther's christological semantics as a whole.³⁸ Yet, it remains the case that these texts seem

³⁷WA TR 6, 68. "Das aber von der Communication, Mittheilung einer Eigenschaft der Natur gesagt und beweiset ist (nehmlich, daß geboren werden &c. der göttlichen Natur auch zugeeignet und von ihr gesagt wird per communicationem idiomatum), dasselbige soll auch verstanden werden von der Communication und Mittheilung der andern Eigenschaften, als leiden, sterben, begraben werden &c.. Wiewol sie eigentlich der menschlichen Natur gebühren und zustehen, doch gibt sich die göttliche Natur in Christo drunter und leidet &c. auch nach dem Spruch Pauli Röm. 8: (1, 331) "Wir müssen dem Ebenbilde des Sohns Gottes gleich werden" &c.. Item: "Der seines eigen Sohns nicht verschonet, sondern hat ihn für uns dahin gegeben &c.." Und in der ersten Epistel zun Corinth. am 2. Cap.: "Denn wo sie die (Herrlichkeit) erkannt hätten, hätten sie den Herrn der Herrlichkeit nicht gecreuziget." Item zun Philippem 2: "Jesus Christus, ob er wol in göttlicher Gestalt war, denn er war Gott gleich, doch nahm er Knechtsgestalt an, ward gleich wie ein ander Mensch und an Geberden wie ein Mensch erfunden, erniedriget sich selber, und ward gehorsam bis zum Tode, ja zum Tode am Creuz." Deßgleichen singet die Kirche: "Vita in ligno moritur" (das Leben stirbt am Holz &c.). Darüm soll man gewiß gläuben, daß Alles, so der menschlichen Natur in Christo eigentlich zusteht und widerfährt, dasselbige wird auch communicirt, zugeeignet und gegeben der göttlichen Natur. Also daß recht und wahrhaftig gesagt wird: Gott wird geboren, gestillet oder gesäuet, lieget in der Krippen, frieret, gehet, stehet, fället, wandert, wachet, isset, trinket, leidet, stirbt &c.." Ngien also thinks Luther's 1539 treatise "On the Councils and the Church" recommends this two-way position. Because of its explicitly soteriological frame of reference, however, we will defer investigation of this text until the next chapter.

³⁸As in the case of the texts discussed in the previous section.

legitimately to point in the direction of a bi-directional doctrine of the communication of attributes. This preliminary concession notwithstanding, the following discussion will argue against Ngien's interpretation of these texts, and suggest that, once situated in broad context, Luther's intent turns out rather explicitly to retain an ongoing commitment to the doctrine of divine impassibility.

The crux of the issue, so far as a divergence interpretation is concerned, resides in Luther's apparent insistence upon the ascription of human predicates not simply to the one Person who happens to be the divine Son (something for which there is extensive patristic and medieval precedent), but also to the divine *nature* itself. Such an insistence seems not only to forgo, but actually bulldoze the qualificatory discourse enlisted within medieval Christology to protect the impassibility and immutability of Christ's divinity. And indeed, this is precisely the conclusion that divergence interpreters wish to draw. There is good reason to question the viability of this interpretation, however. In his 1537 sermon on John 3, for instance, Luther *also* insists that Christ's divinity and humanity both "retain their properties".³⁹ What can such a proviso communicate, if Luther intends by the previous statement to indicate a two-way communication of attributes between natures? If, for instance, the divinity of Christ is impassible by nature, and retains this property even in the event of the incarnation, how can it *also* be true that Christ's divinity shares in the sufferings of the humanity? Wouldn't that be self-contradictory?

To be sure, there are ways to reconcile this apparent tension of meaning within a divergence rendering of Luther's Christology. One could say, for instance, that the divinity retains its own properties in the sense that its sufferings stem not from a

³⁹WA 47, 199.

condition of existence intrinsic to itself, but from its union with the humanity of Christ. In that sense, though the divinity is rightly said to suffer, it does not suffer on account of its own peculiar properties, but solely through its participation in the properties of the human nature to which it is hypostatically joined. In this explanation, the tension of meaning embedded within Luther's statement resolves itself in favor of its latter half, namely, the ostensible affirmation of a two-way communicative exchange between the Christ's humanity and divinity. If we limit ourselves entirely within the parameters of the two sentences cited by Ngien, then the *plausibility* of this hypothetical 'resolution' cannot be denied.⁴⁰

Equally plausible, however, is an interpretation of Luther's statement that resolves the apparent tension of meaning in favor of the statement's first half, namely, the governing qualification that each nature retains its own discrete properties.⁴¹ In either case, one must admit that the precise form of Luther's language presents some degree of awkwardness, or at least inexactitude. That is, whether Luther intends by his statement to communicate either the impassibility or passibility of Christ's divinity, the verbal formulation he adopts to express himself is not immediately transparent to his underlying intent. Standing on its own, the textual tension simply remains; an exegetical obstacle with which the would-be interpreter must wrangle.

⁴⁰It could also be argued that impassibility simply never was a genuine property of divinity, and therefore does not need to be 'retained'. This option, however, is much more difficult to sustain, since Luther often states rather forthrightly that God cannot suffer. Interpreters like Ngien must find a way to explain these statements.

⁴¹The tension is apparent, because Luther's language in these statements is also understandable from within a medieval frame of reference. We will provide evidence to this effect in the closing portion of this section.

Earlier texts from Luther's career furnish reason to entertain the possibility that the intent of his ostensibly 'two-way' language may actually fall within the parameters of characteristic medieval intent. One such text is taken from Luther's 1528 *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*, in which Luther harshly criticizes Ulrich Zwingli's use of a rhetorical device (*alloeosis*) as a means for interpreting christological grammar. In the context of this larger criticism, Luther turns to the question of divine suffering for an illustration of his point:

"Now if the old witch, Lady Reason, alloeosis' grandmother, should say that the Deity surely cannot suffer and die, then you must answer and say: That is true, but since the divinity and humanity are one person in Christ, the Scriptures ascribe to the divinity, because of this personal union, all that happens to humanity, and vice versa. And in reality it is so".⁴²

This text is remarkably similar to the 1537 sermon text cited above by Ngien. In the statement from 1528, Luther insists that everything pertaining to the humanity must be ascribed to the *divinity* of Christ. Strictly speaking, this way of summarizing the *communicatio idiomatum* swerves indeed from the ordinary intent of late medieval Christology, since the latter restricts the application of all christological predicates to the one *Person* of Christ, who is both God and man. The medieval view prohibits the extension of these predicates to 'divinity' as such; a term that ordinarily denotes the divine *nature*. On the basis of this text alone, then, one could justifiably suspect Luther to define the communication of attributes in terms of a two-way exchange between Christ's two natures, thus buttressing a divergence interpretation of his thought.

⁴² LW 37, 210. WA 26, 321a. "Ob nũ hie die allte wettermecherynn fraw vernünfft der Alleosis gros Mutter sagen würde / Ja die gottheit kan nicht leiden noch sterben / Soltu antworten / Das ist war · Aber dennoch weil Gottheit vnd menscheit ynn Christo eine Person ist / so gibt die schrift / vmb solcher personlicher einikeit willen auch der gottheit / alles was der menscheit widderferet / vnd widderumb / Vnd ist auch also ynn der warheit"

To advance such a view on the basis of *this* text, however, turns out to be an overly hasty misconstrual of Luther's position. Luther specifically prohibits the notion of a two-way communication within this text. He does so through qualifactory elucidations, which accord rather seamlessly with the ordinary medieval view of the *communicatio idiomatum*.

"Indeed, you must say that the *person* (pointing to Christ) suffers, and dies. But this *person* is truly God, and therefore it is correct to say: the Son of God suffers. Although, so to speak, the one part (namely, the divinity) does not suffer, nevertheless the *person*, who is God, suffers in the other part (namely, in the humanity)."⁴³

In this clarifying statement, Luther makes it quite clear that his initial statement does not endorse the suffering of the divine *nature*, even if that is how it first appears. His point is rather that the one *Person* of Christ is the acting subject of human predicates, and that this *Person* is, at the same time, fully divine. This clarification is evident not only on the basis of Luther's direct application of all predicates here to the *Person* of Christ rather than to the divine and human natures, but also because he specifically stipulates that Christ *does not* suffer in his divinity, but only in his human nature.⁴⁴ Luther's complaint

⁴³ LW 37, 210. Emphasis mine. WA 26, 321a. "**Denn das müstů ia sagen / Die person (zeige Christum) leidet stirbet / Nů ist die person warhafftiger Gott / drumb ists recht geredt / Gottes son leidet. Denn ob wol das eine stuck. (das ich so rede) als die gottheit „ nicht leidet / so leidet dennoch die person / welche Gott ist / am andern stücke / als an der menscheit"**

⁴⁴Luther continues to make this point clear through a number of analogies that stipulate how a predicate may be attributed to a given subject on account of one 'part', while that same predicate is not true of another 'part'. LW 37, 211. "Just as we say: the king's son is wounded—when actually only his leg is wounded; Solomon is wise—though only his soul is wise; Absalom is handsome—though only his body is handsome; Peter is gray—though only his head is gray. For since body and soul are one person, everything that pertains to the body or the soul, yes, to the least member of the body, is correctly and properly ascribed to the entire person. This is the way people speak throughout the world, not only in Scripture, and it is the truth. For the Son of God truly is crucified for us, i.e. this person who is God. For that is what he is—this person, I say, is crucified according to his humanity." WA 26, 321a-322a. "Gleich als man spricht / des koniges son ist wůnd so doch / allein sein bein wund ist / Salomon ist weise / so doch allein sein seele weise ist Absalom ist schone / so doch allein sein leib schon ist Petrus ist graw / so doch allein sein hewbt graw ist Denn weil leib vnd seele eine person ist / so wirds der gantzen person recht vnd wol zugeeigent / alles was dem leibe odder seele / ia dem geringsten gelied des leibs widderferet // Dis ist die weise zu reden ynn aller welt / nicht allein ynn der schrift / Vnd ist dazů auch die warheit / Denn ynn der warheit ist

against Zwingli is not that he rejects the suffering of the divine *nature*, but because Luther thinks the semantic analysis summarized in the rhetorical term *alloeosis* eschews the unity of Christ, and speaks as if divinity and humanity act as their own discrete subjects.⁴⁵

Because Luther's publication against Zwingli appears approximately nine years before the text cited above from his 1537 sermon on John chapter three, it cannot count in any direct way as contextual evidence constraining Luther's probable meaning in the latter. This concession notwithstanding, the text from 1528 surely attenuates the *prima facie* legitimacy of Ngien's interpretation of the 1537 text, and others like it.⁴⁶ It is at least worthwhile to ask why Luther can invoke these ostensibly 'two-way' descriptions in one instance and specify that he intends by them simply that the attributes of both natures are applied to a single acting subject (the person of Christ), why should it be concluded so abruptly that their appearance elsewhere *must* indicate a genuine, bidirectional communication of attributes in which the divine nature suffers?⁴⁷ The 1528 text illustrates

Gottes son fur vns gecreuzigt / das ist / die Person / die Gott ist / Denn sie ist / Sie (sage ich) die person ist gecreuzigt nach der menscheit"

⁴⁵ LW 37, 211. "But this damned alloeosis exactly inverts the matter and changes it so that it ascribes to the parts what Scripture assigns to the whole person." WA 26, 322a. "Aber die verfluchte Aleosis keret solchs stracks vmb / vnd wil wechseln vnd den stucken zu eigen / das der gantzen persone ynn der schrift zugeeigent wird". Whether or not Luther's interpretation of Zwingli's Christology is accurate is a question we need not examine here. Our concern extends only to what Luther felt it necessary to say of Christ vis-à-vis the communication attributes.

⁴⁶Ngien cites the 1528 text and seems to concede it to express a traditional point of view. However, he fails to notice or acknowledge that this earlier text employs the very same 'two-way' language that he will later argue to demonstrate the suffering of divinity in the 1537 sermon.

⁴⁷The difficulty stems from the fact that Luther seems occasionally to use the term 'divinity' to refer narrowly to the divine nature; and sometimes as a way of referring to the divine Person who becomes incarnate. Thus, in the 1528 text, when he insists upon divinity or deity suffering, he is referring to the fact, as the medieval also emphasize, that the Scriptures ascribe suffering to God because the single Person who is God suffers according to His humanity. One possible root for this ambiguity is the fact that, in late medieval Christology, the divine nature simply *is* the divine Person, whereas the same mode of

the possibility one interpretive alternative, which ought to be considered. The key question thus becomes: which interpretation comports best with Luther's overall argument within the sermons on John that were preached in the late 1530's?

In the case of the specific statement Ngien gleans from Luther's 1537 sermon on John 3, it is important, first of all, to situate Luther's discussion of the communication of attributes in relation to the larger theological question his sermon addresses. The Scripture text in this instance is John 3:35, which reads: "The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands."⁴⁸ On the basis of this text, Luther poses an interesting theological problem for consideration. "Now the question arises again: How do we harmonize these two facts: that He is Lord over all and that at the same time He is a human being? If He is God, how could God give Him all? If He is God, He has always possessed everything."⁴⁹ On the basis of these questions, Luther is afforded the opportunity to reflect at some length upon the issue of christological speech. In particular, he is forced to grapple with how one may licitly refer human predicates (in this case, the fact that Christ 'receives' something) to an acting subject who is divine. The question itself betrays Luther's ongoing indebtedness to a classical frame of reference vis-à-vis the doctrine of God. Its operative assumption resides in an underlying assumption of his that part of what it means for God to be *God* is that He cannot properly be said to receive something, since this would suggest not only a preexisting defect on the part of the divine

identification is not possible when one is speaking of the human nature. This is a possibility we will later have occasion to explore in relation to a significant text from the late medieval scholastic Gabriel Biel.

⁴⁸ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989).

⁴⁹ LW 22, 491. WA 47, 199. "Hie ist nun ein Frage: wie wil sichs reumen, so ehr ein Herr ist uber alles, und ist gleichwohl auch mensch? So ehr den Gott ist, wie hatt ehr ihme alles gegeben? ist ehr Gott, so hat ehre zuvor alles".

being, but also God's innate capacity to experience change. If Luther did not deem these implications to be theologically unacceptable, there would be no reason for the question he poses to arise in the first place.

Luther addresses his question by appealing to the doctrine of the communication of attributes, reminding his hearers that the unity of God and man in Christ is such that human predicates are ascribed to God and vice versa. It is from this section that Ngien gleans his primary evidence for a reciprocal exchange of properties between the divinity and humanity of Christ. A brief survey of a few examples will again demonstrate why such an interpretation possesses some degree of *prima facie* plausibility. Luther's preliminary summation of the doctrine surely leaves the door open for Ngien's construal. "You know about the communication of properties: two natures dwell in the Lord Christ, and yet He is but one person. These two natures retain their properties, and each also communicates its properties to the other."⁵⁰ In a subsequent elaboration of his point, Luther even seems to corroborate the divergence thesis directly by specifically endorsing the application of Christ's human sufferings to His divine nature.

"The two natures, the human and the divine, are inseparable. They are so united in one Person that the properties of the one nature are also attributed to the other. For instance, mortality is peculiar to human nature; now that the human nature is united in one Person with the divine, death, exclusively the attribute of the human nature, is also

⁵⁰LW 22, 491-2. WA 47, 199. "Jhr wisset, das do sej die Communicatio Idiomatum, das in dem herrn Christo sein zweierlej natur und doch nur eine Person, und das diese zwo naturen furen und behalten, ja mit einander teilen ire eigenschafften." This is the primary text cited by Ngien, as we have already documented above. We must also cite in Ngien's favor Luther's subsequent summary: "Since His incarnation the two natures are united; and the divine nature confers its properties on the human, and, vice versa, the human on the divine." LW 22, 493. "Do ehr aber nun mensch ist, do tragen die zwo naturen ir eigenschafft zusammen, und gibt die gottliche natur der menschlichen ire eigenschafft, und hinwider die menscheit auch der gottlichen natur." WA 47, 200.

ascribed to the divine. Now we can say: “God became man, God suffered, and God died.”⁵¹

Here it is important to recall, however, that Luther’s overarching concern in this section is to reflect upon how certain attributes or actions, which are clearly human in derivation, may be applied to the Person of Christ who is also divine. The difficulty involved with this, as we have already noted, stems from the ontological distinction separating divinity and humanity which Luther seems to acknowledge as valid. The overall shape of Luther’s argument that emerges from this acknowledgment may be summarized in the following statement.

Although unbroachable polarities between humanity and divinity seem to proscribe any mutual predication transfer, the union of God and man in Christ is such that the application of human properties ‘to God’ is licit, and indeed *necessary*.

Luther explicates this line of reasoning in an important paragraph of his sermon.

“Since the two natures are united in one Person, the effect is that the properties are also united. Admittedly, the properties of the divine nature have nothing in common with human nature. I shall go beyond this and say that there is still less relation between God and man. Yet these two natures are so united that there is only one God and Lord, that Mary suckles God with her breasts, bathes God, rocks Him, and carries Him; furthermore, that Pilate and Herod crucified and killed God. The two natures are so joined that the true deity and humanity are one. Now if the true God dwells in Christ, who was born of Mary, that is, the God who made and created all, we must say that the deity and the humanity joined not only their natures but also their properties, except for sin.”⁵²

⁵¹ LW 22, 492. WA 47, 199. “Gleich wie die zwo naturen, die menscheit und Gottheit, unzertrennet sein, sondern also vereinigt in einer person, das was von einer natur geredet wirdt der andern auch zugeschrieben, als sterben ist menschlicher natur eigen, do ist den die menschliche natur vereinigt in einer person mit der Gottheit, das der todt, der doch allein der menschlichen natur wirdt zugesprochen, auch der Gottheit zugeeignet wirdt, und dan gesagt wirdt: gott ist mensch worden, Gott hat gelidden und ist gestorben.”

⁵² LW 22, 492-3. WA 47, 200. “Den die zwo naturen sind in einer person vereinigt, drumb sind die folge und eigenschafft auch vereinigt. Und ist war, das die eigenschafft der gottlichen natur rejmet sich nicht mit der menschlichen natur, und ich wil noch mehr sagen: Gott und mensch rejmet sich noch weniger, und dennoch sind die zwo naturen also vereinigt, das do Ein Gott und Herr sej, das Maria Gott seuget mit ihren brusten und Gott badet, wieget und hebet, item Pilatus und Herodes Gott gecreutzigt und todtgeschlagen haben, und reimen sich die zwo natur also zusammen, das die ware gottheit und menscheit ein dieng ist. So nun ein warhafftiger Gott in Christo ist, der geboren ist aus Maria, das ist: der alles gemacht

Structurally, we can observe that the progression of thought encapsulated within this paragraph is comprised of four implicit components.

1. Preliminary Concession: The properties of divinity and humanity are irreducibly different from one another.
2. Apparent Semantic Implication: This irreducible difference renders it ostensibly impossible and therefore improper to apply human properties to a divine subject (as John 3:35 apparently does by suggesting that Christ ‘receives’ something)
3. Salient Theological Reality: Yet, God and man are united in the person of Christ.
4. Semantic Re-Calibration: Therefore divine properties may be spoken of man, and human properties of God.

The crucial question has to do with whether and how Luther ascribes validity to components one and two of this fourfold progression. To what extent do these qualifications retain legitimacy *after* the union of God and man in Christ? In what ways must the new, christologically defined semantic context still respect the ontological gap between divinity and humanity with which Luther begins his discussion? Is the gap merely displaced?

For Ngien, Luther’s Christology presupposes a genuinely *diachronic* ontological shift, which narrows the gap between divinity and humanity. Whereas in His pre-incarnate state, the eternal Son is indeed incapable of suffering *per se*, this property of divinity ‘adjusts’ in the event of the incarnation. Once united with a human nature capable of suffering, the divine nature *becomes* a genuine participant in creaturely passibility. We are labeling this interpretation ‘diachronic’ because the properties of divine being undergo a sequentially mediated transformation. This transformation is precisely what creates the fundamentally *new* semantic context to which Luther now

und geschaffen hat, so mus man sagen, das sie nicht allein ihr natur zusammen gefast und getragen haben, sondern auch ihre eigenschafften, ausgenommen die Sunde.”

appeals.⁵³ The original polarity between divinity and humanity is overcome (or at least attenuated) through an ontologically conditioning event in which attributive proscriptions formerly appropriate (components one and two) forfeit their ongoing viability when once God actually becomes man.⁵⁴ Within this view, the predication restrictions reflected in Luther's original question (how can God be said to 'receive' something?) possess validity only in the sense that they *used* to be true.⁵⁵ The obsolete ontological realities they express, however, must not be allowed to qualify christological discourse in the present. The notion that divinity cannot suffer is true when the divine being is conceived in its anterior, pre-incarnate status. It *becomes* inapplicable once God assumes human flesh, however. Luther's solution to the question of how God can 'receive' something, according to Ngien's interpretation, is to emphasize a diachronic contrast between 'divinity-by-itself', and 'divinity-in-union-with-humanity'. The conceptual tension is resolved by the 'reality-altering' event of the incarnation, which distinguishes these two discrete objects of semantic reference.⁵⁶

⁵³In order to bypass the implication here that the divine Son or the Trinity becomes 'something else' in this process, Ngien suggests that the being of God is constituted in such a way that this event is always included. See Dennis Ngien, *The Suffering of God According to Martin Luther's 'Theologia Crucis'* (Vancouver: Regent College Pub, 2005), 151-2.

⁵⁴Here we have another expression of the deep inter-connectivity between parts one and two of this chapter. Ngien's construal of Luther's proposed semantic shift presupposes a doctrine of the hypostatic union that is ontologically conditioning so far as the divine person is concerned. Although he does not name it as such, this view points strongly in the direction of a 'composite' doctrine of Christ's person.

⁵⁵Or, perhaps, they are true only when treated in a context (perhaps philosophy) that abstracts from the reality of the incarnation. Of course, this would still represent a diachronic shift because, although philosophy may speak in this way, Luther is not reticent to insist that God truly *has* become man. In that sense, philosophy no longer could be seen to refer to 'the real', but to a set of circumstances (separation of divinity and humanity) that no longer exist. Ngien gestures in this direction by seeing the 'abstract' as the perview of philosophy, and the 'concrete' as pertaining to theology. See Dennis Ngien, *The Suffering of God According to Martin Luther's 'Theologia Crucis'*, 82.

⁵⁶Again, Ngien does not want to make of the pre-incarnate and incarnate Son two *Persons*. Nevertheless, his arbitration of Luther's qualificatory discourse depends upon Luther granting at least some previous validity to statements such as 'God cannot suffer' that no longer attains because of a diachronic

A diachronic interpretation capably preserves the viability of the divergence thesis, but is it faithful to Luther's actual point of view? Subsequent qualificatory discourse within Luther's sermon on John 3 suggests not. This discourse reflects what could be termed a 'synchronic' application of attributive proscriptions.⁵⁷

"Throughout his entire Gospel John speaks of Christ as a true and natural human being, and also as divine. Here he refers to Christ, who was born, was baptized, and has disciples, as a real human being; at the same time he declares that all that is God's alone was given into His hands. He employs the term "given to Him," *which again applies to the human nature*.

Thus the two natures are united in one Person, and there are not two Christ's. Therefore, when you hear it said that God gave all things into Christ's hands and that He raised Him from the dead, *remember that this is spoken of Christ as man*. Then again, when we hear the expression: "He is seated at the right hand of God the Father," bear in mind that the human nature is united with the divine. To be in heaven and to be on earth are one thing, just as to be crucified and to live are one thing. We spoke of this before in chapter six. If you are perplexed by the statement that Christ died and that He is alive, you might find it still stranger to hear that Christ is God and man in one Person, that Christ died on the cross as a man, and that He nonetheless remains Christ in eternity.

You must learn to brush aside all such doubts and misgivings. We are also called Christians because we acknowledge Christ in His doctrine. How can anything be given to Him? *According to His deity, He does not receive anything*; but God gave all to Christ inasmuch as God and man are one Person."⁵⁸

ontological shift mediated by the event of the incarnation. For more on Ngien's treatment of this discourse, see below.

⁵⁷That is, a mode of qualification, which retains components one and two of the afore-outlined argument even after the event of the incarnation (at the very least, Luther denies that *divinity* undergoes any diachronic change).

⁵⁸LW 22, 493-4. Emphasis mine. WA 47, 200-201. "Und redet Joannes durch sein gantz Euangelium von Christo als einem pur lautern menschen und widerumb &c.. Alhier redet ehr von Christo, der geborn und getaufft ist, und der **discipulos** hat, als der warhafftig ein naturlicher mensch ist, und dennochs gibt ehr ihme alles in seine Hende, das gott allein gehoert, und dennochs spricht ehr: ihme gegeben. Das stehet einem menschen zu. Also sindt die zwo naturen vereinigt in einer person, das do nicht zwene Christus sind. Drumb wen du horest einen spruch von Christo, das im Gott alles in seine hende gebe und ihnen von den todten erwecke, Solches ist dan von Christo geredet als einem menschen. Widerumb saget man: ehr sitzet zur rechten hand gottes des vaters, Do wirdt vereinigt die menschlich natur mit der Gottheit, und ist dan gecreutzigt werden und leben ein dieng, undten und droben sein ein dieng, wie wir droben im 6. cap. auch gesagt haben. Stost dich das nun fur den kopff, das Christus gestorben sej und lebe, viel mehr solt dich das seltsam duncken, das Christus Gott und mensch sej eine Person, das Christus am Creutze stirbet als ein mensch und bleibet doch Christus in ewigkeit. Also solt ihr Euch gewehnen, das ihr richtig hindurch gehet durch alle ergerniss, und wir heissen auch drumb Christen, das wir ihnen erkennen aus seiner lehre. Wie kan im dan etwas gegeben werden? Nach der Gottheit nimpt ehre nicht, sondern weil Gott und mensch eine person ist, do hat ehr Christo gegeben."

What we find in these paragraphs is an elaboration of Luther's underlying point about christological speech, which he expresses through differentiated, specificatory predicate analysis; that is, through statements or phrases that identify the specific 'part', 'property', or 'component' by virtue of which a given predication is truly, or validly applied to Christ.⁵⁹ In this case, Luther is rather clear that it is according to Christ's *human* nature that He is said to receive all things from God. He also clarifies by way of specificatory restriction the implication this analysis is intended to proscribe, namely, that the ascription of these human properties and activities proceeds 'according to His deity.'

This discourse problematizes Ngien's interpretation, because it reflects Luther's ongoing assumption that 'divinity' cannot directly receive gifts, suffer or die, even in the case of the *incarnate* Christ. As in his 1528 "Confession concerning Christ's Supper," Luther's point in the 1537 sermon is rather that the one *Person*, who is both divine and human, is the attributive recipient of properties belonging to both natures. Because of this fact, one may freely affirm the Johannine text which describes Christ (who is divine) to receive all things from God, without implying that this ascription applies directly to the Son's divinity. The specificatory discourse enlisted to explain this point makes it rather clear that Luther does not think this christologically oriented, semantic shift entails the passibility of the divine nature. To the contrary, such an implication seems rather overtly to be disallowed.

⁵⁹These nouns appear in quotation marks because none is strictly appropriate for referring to the humanity of Christ as understood by Luther or his medieval predecessors. Here we find ourselves within the same dilemma engaged so prolifically during the medieval period, namely, what language can be used to refer to an object that is, by definition, entirely unique?

Luther attends to similar qualifications in a number of other sermons on John 1-4, all of which were preached between the years of 1537-1540, during Johannes Bugenhagen's (1485-1558) visitation errand to Denmark. A brief sampling of this peripheral evidence will reinforce the conclusion that Luther does not think the divinity of Christ is ontologically conditioned by the actions and properties that are properly derived from His humanity. For instance, in an explanation of John 1:4, "In Him was life," Luther calls attention to the enduring invulnerability of Christ's divinity throughout His passion: "Therefore He does not die according to His divine nature and come back to life; He is life, not only in Himself, but everything that lives has life in Him and through Him, especially man."⁶⁰ More closely reminiscent of Luther's comments on John 3:35 is an earlier homiletical reflection upon John 3:12: "No one has ascended into heaven but He who descended from heaven." Luther admits how strange it appears to say of a person who is God (and thus omnipresent) that He 'descended.'

"How can reason harmonize the declaration that He descended and yet dwells above, that He ascended again and yet was continuously above in heaven? No human heart or mind can conceive such a thought. Reason says that it is impossible for one to descend from heaven and yet remain in heaven at the same time. Therefore we Christians are regarded as extremely stupid people to believe things that are impossible and diametrically opposed to reason."⁶¹

⁶⁰ LW 22, 30. WA 46, 561. "Darumb stirbet er nicht nach seinem Goettlichen wesen und wird widerumb lebendig, sondern er ist das Leben, nicht allein in jm selber, sondern alles, was da lebet, das hat das Leben in jm und durch jn, sonderlich der Mensch." This section from John 1 is also a very important of Luther's soteriological application of two-nature Christology, a point we will have occasion to explore at some length in the following chapter.

⁶¹ LW 22, 322. WA 47, 51. "Das ist das Zeugniß und die seltzame predigt, die allein Christo zustehet, und wie kan sich auch die Vernunft schicken in diese seltzame rede, das sie kondte vernemen, wie sich das zusammen reime: Herab fharen und gleichwohl droben sein, und wider hinauff fharen und doch stets droben gewesen. Das kan in keines menschen hertzen noch gedanken kommen. Es ist unmuglich, sagt die vernunft, das vom himel herab steigen und gleichwohl droben bleiben kundte bejdes zu gleich war sein. Darumb sind wir Christen aus der

In an attempt to reconcile this tension, Luther allocates a significant amount of his subsequent discussion to the matter of christological predication, and the communication of attributes. Here again, the salient point Luther stresses is the fact that Christ is one Person existing in two natures, and that this theological reality carries with it unique semantic implications.

“But there is only one Son; and yet there are two natures, which gave Mary the right to say: “This Son Jesus, whom I bore and suckled on my breasts, is the eternal God, born of the Father in eternity, and also my Son.” And God says likewise: “Mary’s Son is My only Son.” Thus Mary is the mother of God. And Christ, together with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, is very God from eternity who became man in time. So God the Father does not have a son apart from Mary’s, nor does Mary have a son apart from God the Father’s. This is the foundation on which our faith rests: that Jesus Christ has two natures even though He is one indivisible Person. There are not two sons and two persons; there is one Son and one Person.”⁶²

Luther’s primary point in this section echoes his interpretation of John 3:35. He argues, essentially, that one may rightly ascribe human predicates (such as spatial movement) to Christ who is God, without thereby suggesting that the divine *nature* of Christ is thereby affected. Christ’s deity always remains what it was, according to Luther, and suffers no change when human properties or activities are applied to Christ. In order to make this clear, Luther furnishes his hearers with the analogy of a human person

massen nerrische leute, das wir solch unmöglich dieng gleuben, so stracks wider die Vernunft strebet.”

⁶²LW 22, 323-4. WA 47, 52. “Aber es ist nur ein Sohn, und doch zwo Naturn, das Maria also kan sagen: Dieser Sohn Jhesus, den ich geborn und an meiner brust geseuget hab, ist ewiger Gott und vom Vater in Ewigkeit geborn, Gottes Sohn, und auch mein Sohn. Dergleichen saget Gott auch: Marien Sohn ist mein einiger Sohn. Ist also Maria Gottes Mutter, und Christus warhafftiger Gott von ewigkeit mit gott dem vater und dem Heiligem Geist und zeitlich mensch geborn worden, das Gott der vater nicht einen andern Sohn hat den Maria, noch Maria einen andern Sohn den Gott der vater. Das ist der grund, darauff unser glaub stehet, das Jhesus Christus zwo naturn hab, ob er schon ein einige, unzertrenliche person ist. Es sind nicht zwene sohne noch zwo personen, sondern ein Sohn und eine person.”

comprised of body and soul, which illustrates how speech can sometimes refer to a whole as if undifferentiated, even when there exists within that whole constituent realities that relate to that particular reference rather differently. A human stabbed by a knife will not customarily specify that she is stabbed according to her corporeal body, but refers the action to the whole of her person. Nevertheless, this does not mean that a person's soul is somehow also stabbed by a knife as a consequence of the predication!⁶³ Luther recognizes the same semantic patterns of whole-part specification within christological discourse. Of course it is true that God cannot move spatially, suffer or die, he reasons, but God and man are truly one *Person* in Christ, and therefore predicates deriving from one nature or the other can rightly be applied to the whole Person in which these 'parts' together subsist.⁶⁴

“We are told here that Christ, true God and born as true man, descended according to His humanity, that God's Son died, descended into hell, and ascended again into heaven; that at the same time God remained in heaven, for the Godhead does not move about hither and thither but is omnipresent; and that according to His human nature, Christ ascended up above all. One may properly say that since there are two natures in one Being and Person, God's Son came down and entered the Virgin's womb and God's Son descended into hell. Although this really applied only to the human

⁶³LW 22, 327-8. WA 47, 55-6. Of course, there are a number of ways in which this analogy falls short, as Luther himself acknowledges in his explanation.

⁶⁴Luther's use of this analogy need not commit him to a whole-parts analogy for the hypostatic union, as Richard Cross argues Aquinas to endorse. He is, of course, far from unique in the history of theology, in appropriating the body-soul metaphor for a christological purpose.

nature, by virtue of the personal union in Christ it is also ascribed to the other nature. “That which applies to one nature, applies to the entire person in the concrete.”⁶⁵

In this text we find an additional clue for how Luther intends the statements Ngien isolates, which seem, on a *prima facie* level, to indicate a two-way communication of attributes. In the penultimate statement of the paragraph, we find another instance in which Luther affirms that human properties are ‘ascribed to the other nature’, a statement that, were it not for its immediate context, could easily count as evidence in favor of a divergence reading. But one need only consult the first half of the same statement to see that Luther cannot intend here an exchange of ontologically conditioning bi-directionality, since he specifically restricts the various human predication directed to Christ as ‘really’ applying to His *human nature* alone. A divergence interpretation of his explanation would also cut against the grain of the larger textual pericope, since Luther is arguing throughout that, although surely the divine nature *cannot* experience the things apparently attributed to it christologically in Scripture (a restriction that remains in force even after the incarnation has taken place), such attributions are, in fact licit, because they refer to the whole (Christ) on account of a specific ‘part’ (the human nature).⁶⁶

⁶⁵ LW 22, 328. WA 47, 56. “Dergleichen wird alhier auch gesaget, das Christus, warer Gott und mensch geboren, sej herab gefharen nach seiner menscheit, und ist Gottes sohn gestorben und nidder in die Helle gefharen und wider hinauff in himmel gefharen und dennochs Gott, droben geblieben, den die Gottheit nirgends hin fheret, nicht dort oder da, sondern allenthalben ist, und nach der menscheit ist ehr hinauff uber alles gefharen. Noch sol man also sagen, dieweil in einer person und in einem wesen zwo natur sind, das Gottes Sohn herab gestiegen sej in der Jungfrauen Marien leib und in die helle gefharen, wiewol solchs allein der menschlichen natur zustunde, jedoch wirds der andern natur auch zugeeignet umb der personlichen einigkeit willen in Christo. Nam quae uni naturae conveniunt, toti personae conveniunt in concreto.” Luther’s invocation here of the medieval distinction between abstract and concrete predication is extremely important, and will be the object of specific focus in the subsequent discussion of Luther’s 1540 disputation.

⁶⁶ Again, the term ‘part’ appears here within quotation marks because a consistent application of this analogy yields implications that Luther, like many medieval authors who also use it, will want to avoid. It could be taken, for instance, to imply a composite doctrine of Christ’s personhood as a ‘fusion’ or

Prima facie impressions aside, these considerations render it rather clear that when Luther speaks in terms of human properties being ascribed to ‘divinity’, he is expressing the point that the person of Christ, who is truly divine, is the attributive object to which all predicates are rightly assigned; and that *in this sense*, one may rightly say that God descended, receives gifts, suffers, is crucified, dies and so forth.⁶⁷ In any case, the contextual qualifications that surround Luther’s apparently novel statements in the John sermons proscribe concluding, on their basis, that Luther’s Christology includes a clear commitment to divine passibility.⁶⁸

The same is true of Luther’s 1540 “Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ”, which Ngien similarly appropriates as evidence for a two-way communication between natures. To be sure, here again one finds a number of phrases in Luther’s discourse that appear to point in such a direction. For instance, in his opening preface to

‘mixture’ of two previously separate parts. These unwanted consequences are a large reason why the substance-accident model is generally preferred in medieval antecedents, an analogy that Luther also invokes rather prevalently. One example appears in the 1540 disputation itself in Luther’s examination of how ‘whiteness’ is ordinarily ascribed to a person or object. See below.

⁶⁷Without the apparent implication that each ‘nature’ is conditioned thereby.

⁶⁸Subsequent sections of Luther’s sermons on John from 1537-1540 continue to reinforce this argument. For instance, in another text commenting on John 3, Luther reflects upon the fact that the evangelist predicts Christ being lifted up upon the cross. In order to explain how such a thing may be spoken of Christ who is God, Luther says: “This applies properly only to His human nature, since God cannot suffer and be crucified. And yet Christ says here that the Son of God was given into death and was crucified. From this we learn about the “communication of properties,” the fact that the attributes of both natures pertain to the one Person, that the attributes of both natures inhere in the one person.” LW 22, 361. In the same section, he also states: “To be sure, Christ was crucified according to His humanity, and He created heaven and earth according to His divinity; but since this one Person is God and man, it is proper to say: God’s Son is the Creator of heaven and earth, and God’s Son was also crucified. One dare not divide the Person, leaving only the human nature; but one must bear in mind that this Person is also God.” LW 22, 362. WA 47, 86. “Den solches eigenet auch der menschlichen natur allein zu, den Gott hatt nicht können leiden noch ans creutz geschlagen werden. Noch spricht ehr alhier, das der Sohn Gottes sej in den tod gegeben und ans creutz gehenget worden, auff das wir hieraus lernen **Communicationem Idiomatum**, das die eigenschafft beider natur sich zihen auff diese einige person, und also beider natur eigenschafft zu stehen der einigen person.” WA 47, 87. “Nach der Menschheit, do ist wohl gecreutziget, und nach der Gottheit allein Himel und Erden geschaffen, aber dieweil diese Person Got und mensch ist, so wirdt recht gesaget: Gottes Sohn ist Schopffer himmels und der erden und wirdt auch gecreutziget. Man mus die Person nicht zutrennen, als, das alleine die Menschheit da bliebe, sondern sie auch Gott gewesen ist”.

the public debate, Luther comments “what is attributed to one nature is attributed to the other as well, because they are one person.”⁶⁹ This mode of description clearly lays emphasis upon the *personal* union of God and man, but seems semantically to suggest that this union enables Christ’s two *natures* to exchange with one another all of their respective properties.⁷⁰ In this, Luther’s vocabulary is strangely reminiscent of the sermons on John 1-4 from 1537-1540, as well as his earlier explanation in the 1528 “Confession concerning Christ’s Supper”. The question, which must be addressed, is whether Luther’s language in 1540 is accompanied by similar mechanisms of qualification, which explicate his theological intent along similar lines. Locating these scattered statements within the framework of Luther’s overarching argument throughout the disputation provides important preliminary clues about what this intent might be.

In some ways, the object of Luther’s concern in this text is analogous to what was already found to be the case in his homiletic treatment of John 3:35. The fundamental question he is obliged to address, in both instances, is *whether* and *how* ‘human’ properties may be predicated of Christ, even though He is fully divine. In the case of the 1540 disputation, the urgency of the riddle is impressed upon Luther, not by a specific scriptural text (like John 3:35, for instance), but by a series of recent and burgeoning complaints registered by Caspar Schwenckfeld that Lutheran theologians (along with Roman Catholic and Reformed counterparts) are wrong to endorse the

⁶⁹Translation by Christopher Brown. WA 39/II, 98. “Non sunt duo filii, non duo iudices, non duae personae, non duo Iesus, sed propter unitam coniunctionem et unitatem duarum naturarum fit communicatio idiomatum, ut, quid uni naturae tribuitur, tribuitur et alteri, quia fit una persona.”

⁷⁰ Similar language shows up in at least two versions of the public debate. WA 39/II, 102a. “Crucifigi est unum idioma naturae humanae, sed quia duae naturae sunt in una persona unitae, tribuitur utrique naturae”; and WA 39/II, 108b “Est communicatio idiomatum. Hoc quod proprium est humanae naturae, est commune divinae.”

statement that “Christ is a creature”, on the grounds that the full divinity of Christ is called into question thereby.⁷¹ Although the focus of Luther’s argument naturally rests upon defending the legitimacy of Christ’s “creatureliness”, the disputation also deals with matters of christological predication in general, and the analysis of theological statements. This is because Schwenckfeld’s complaint implicitly calls into question *any* instance in which an unambiguously *human* attribute is ascribed directly to Christ. Luther’s strategy of response is accordingly wide-ranging in scope. It enlists the explanatory assistance of multiple predication examples, each of which serves further to de-validate Schwenckfeld’s accusation.⁷²

Schwenckfeld errs, according to Luther because he treats internally differentiated objects of reference (in this case, Christ) artificially as non-differentiated or uniform. He fails to account for the way in which predications often apply to their objects in an internally differentiated manner.⁷³ Christologically, Schwenckfeld mistakenly assumes that the statement “Christ is a creature” applies to Christ *simpliciter*; that is,

⁷¹ For additional comments on the argument of the 1540 disputation, see the discussion already provided in the previous chapter regarding what it communicates about Luther’s view of suppositional carrying.

⁷² Luther’s tendency to clarify a particular matter of predication in light of others is also anticipated in the sermons on John, where, for instance, the question of Christ ‘receiving’ something is elucidated in light of Christ also being said to suffer, die, be lifted up, and etc. Luther can adopt this more comprehensive mode of response because the root issue of predication uniting these various examples is the same, namely, may one licitly refer human properties to Christ who is the Son of God?

⁷³ Graham White helpfully condenses Luther’s response by isolating the central ‘fallacies’ the disputation exposes within Schwenckfeld’s apparent critique of the statement that “Christ is a creature.” See Graham White, *Luther as Nominalist*, 239-53. More specifically, White refers to two logical fallacies that Luther finds in Schwenckfeld’s reasoning: 1) *simpliciter* and *secundum quid*; and 2) composition and division. See *Ibid.*, 239. Luther lays explicit emphasis upon the latter of these fallacies, stating in the preface that Schwenckfeld’s use of it is the “hidden tooth of the serpent.” WA 39/II, 99. “Schwenckfeld scelerate advertit: Ergo Christus simpliciter est creatura. Quare tu nequam non addis: Christus secundum divinitatem est creator? Ergo est creatus. Sed non addit, quia dicit: Ego sino ita debilitari meam conscientiam. Ideo omisi, id est, scelerate feci. Ipse utitur fallacia compositionis et divisionis. Hic est occultus morsus serpentis et verum sacrificium diaboli etiam apud papistas.” For more on the fallacy of *secundum quid ad simpliciter*, see Allan T. Bäck, “Aquinas on the Incarnation”, 137.

without restrictive or specificatory qualification. This strange flattening of christological discourse is the source of his confusion. Because of it, he argues in essentially the following way:

1. Christ is divine.
2. Divinity, by its very nature, is *not* created.
3. The term ‘creature’, however, denotes a being that *is* created.
4. Therefore, it is false to say that ‘Christ is a creature’.

On the basis of this implicit reasoning, Schwenckfeld concludes that the phrase ‘Christ is a creature’ is tantamount to an outright endorsement of Arianism. It appears to consign Christ to a *merely* ‘created’ status. Luther’s response to this line of reasoning seems, first and foremost, to be exasperation. Schwenckfeld evinces, for him, a truly stunning lack of logical-semantic sophistication, for which Luther knows not whether to credit ignorance or malice.⁷⁴

⁷⁴Luther expresses this point with characteristic vigor. WA 39/II, 97. “Causa huius disputationis est haec, quod volui, vos esse instructos et praemunitos ad futuras insidias diaboli, quia edidit quidam cavillationem quandam contra Ecclesiam. Non me hoc tam movet, quod homo indoctus, imperitus ac ignarus omnium quaerit sibi laudem et nomen aliquod, quam hoc, quod homines inferioris Germaniae moti sunt illius ineptis, stultis, imperitis, incultis ac ridiculis cavillationibus.” The reformer’s incredulity on this score is a function of two primary observations, both of which are expressed in the theses of the disputation itself. In the first place, he notes that the presupposed meaning upon which Schwenckfeld’s repudiation of the statement “Christ is a creature” is based entirely upon a rendering that mutilates its rather unambiguous intent within contemporary 16th century christological discourse, and (more prominently) the ancient Christian tradition. Schwenckfeld’s inability to discern this fact, Luther speculates, must stem either from his unwillingness or inability to understand that the statement is ascribed *according to Christ’s humanity*, and thus, without any accompanying denigration of the Son’s full, and eternal divinity. Luther’s frustration with this oversight is apparently compounded by his second observation, namely, that differentiated predications of this sort are by no means the provenance of theology alone, but are also native to ordinary human discourse. The statement: “The Ethiopian is white according to his teeth”, for instance, does not entail that the Ethiopian is white in every respect. Neither does it imply that the Ethiopian’s ‘whiteness’, applied in a more restricted manner (that is, according to his teeth), essentially conditions the pigmentation of any other dimensions of his corporeal existence. It would not preclude, for instance, affirming as equally valid the statement that “the Ethiopian is black according to his hair”. The extent to which this analogy is directly applicable to christological speech is somewhat limited for various reasons, a point that both Luther and the medieval scholastics who enlist it readily acknowledge.

Luther's argument to the contrary nowhere denies Schwenckfeld's concern that the 'non-created status' of the divine nature of Christ's divine nature be retained.⁷⁵ The ground upon which Luther criticizes Schwenckfeld's christological semantics illustrates an underlying agreement with Schwenckfeld's governing insistence that the divinity of Christ is not ontologically conditioned by the creatureliness of His humanity. Luther's gripe with Schwenckfeld's criticism, then, is not that it wrongly defends the legitimate non-creatureliness of Christ (with respect to His divinity), nor that he expresses reticence to apply human predicates to the divine nature. Luther's fundamental concern is that the statement "Christ is a creature" does not mitigate either of these commitments, and never has. Predication referring to an individually subsistent whole does not entail an undifferentiated semantics. Indeed, forcing such a semantics would inevitably mischaracterize the various 'parts' included within the intended object of descriptive reference.

The *non sequitur* standing at the center of Schwenckfeld's criticism, in other words, is his assumption that the assertion "*Christ* is a creature" is essentially equivalent with "Christ's *divinity* is a creature." Luther rejects this equation. For him, 'Christ is a creature,' reflects the fact that the Person of Christ possesses a human nature, which is undeniably *created*. With respect to His *divine* nature, Christ is *not* a creature, but the creator. The basis for such 'differentiated speech', is the correspondingly differentiated union of divinity and humanity in the one Person of Christ. This union makes it possible to affirm Christ's creatureliness, *and* non-creatureliness, without the implication of

⁷⁵In other words, he tacitly accepts the premises reflected in the first two steps of Schwenckfeld's argument, as summarized in the previous paragraph. This mirrors Luther's evident assumption in the John 3 sermon that God cannot really receive anything.

logical contradiction. Schwenckfeld's failure to understand all this raises serious doubts in Luther's mind whether he grasps the full reality of the incarnation.⁷⁶

Luther uses Schwenckfeld's evident confusion concerning the creatureliness of Christ as an occasion for general reflection upon modes of christological speech. The statements Ngien isolates from the 1540 disputation as evidence of an endorsement of divine passibility emerge from this subsidiary exercise. The larger context, which surrounds these 'passibilist comments' mitigates the preliminary impression, upon which Ngien capitalizes, that Luther intends by them to affirm the suffering of Christ's divine *nature*. If his intent *were* to endorse this point of view, why would Luther go to such great lengths to demonstrate (contra Schwenckfeld) that property ascriptions referring to the single subject of Christ (such as creatureliness) do not entail any characterization of Christ's divinity? Why doesn't Luther simply attack Schwenckfeld's reticence to acknowledge that *divinity* is a creature, because the incarnation ontologically conditions the divine nature of Christ by way of two-way, communicative exchange? In other words, if Luther protects the divine nature from an ascription of 'creatureliness' or the capacity to 'receive' something, why would other human predicates—like the capacity to suffer—by any different?

These plausibility questions would be largely irrelevant, of course, if it could be convincingly shown that Luther simply *does* ascribe suffering and other human predicates to the divinity of Christ within other sections of the disputation. This, however, is not the case. Luther employs clear specificatory qualifications, which supervise and

⁷⁶This is why Luther registers his suspicion that Schwenckfeld's unwillingness to refer to Christ as creature harbors latently Eutychian sensibilities, by which he means that the genuine humanity of Christ is potentially compromised by being absorbed into divinity. WA 39/II, 95. How exactly this interpretation relates to the actual position of Eutyches in the christological controversies of the early church is not one that may detain us here.

restrict the meaning of the *communicatio idiomatum*. This discourse places unambiguous limits on *how* human *idioma* may be applied to Christ. So, for instance, one transcript of the public debate records the following, which is again strangely reminiscent of Luther's early treatment of John 3:35.

“Argument: If Christ were true God, of the same essence with the Father, the Scripture would not teach that he received all things from the Father. But Scripture so says. Therefore he is not true God.”

“I respond to the minor premise: This [pertains to] his ministry and humanity. For in divinity he is equal in power with the Father.”⁷⁷

Luther's response here that ‘receiving’ pertains exclusively to the humanity of Christ underscores his acquiescence to the presupposition that the divinity of Christ *cannot* receive, a restriction that clearly retains its force even post-incarnation. The biblical statement that ‘Christ ‘receives’ is nevertheless valid, because reference to the one Person, does not entail a symmetrical characterization of both natures.

This same pattern of differentiating analysis appears in Luther's analysis of the statement that ‘Christ’ or ‘God suffers’ elsewhere within the disputation.

“The Father does not will that the human nature should have to bear divine epithets..., despite the union, and yet sometimes [Christ] speaks of himself as of God, when he says, "The Son of Man will be crucified." To be crucified is a property of the human nature, but because there are two natures united in one person, it is attributed to both natures. Again, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life." There he speaks of the divine nature. Or again, "They crucified the Lord of glory," where he speaks of the property of the humanity.”⁷⁸

⁷⁷Translation by Christopher Brown. WA 39/II, 104a. Si Christus esset verus Deus, eiusdem essentiae cum patre, non doceret scriptura: Omnia a patre accepit. Sed scriptura ita dicit: Ergo non est verus Deus. Respondeo ad minorem: Quod ad suum ministerium et humanitatem. Nam in divinitate est aequalis potentia cum patre.”

⁷⁸Translation by Christopher Brown. WA 39/II, 102a. “Pater non vult, ut humana natura debeat gerere dicta divina, etiamsi sit unitas, sed tamen aliquando loquitur de se tamquam Deo, cum dicit: Filius hominis crucifigetur. Crucifigi est unum idioma naturae humanae, sed quia duae naturae sunt in una persona unitae, tribuitur utrique naturae. Item, qui credit in filium habet vitam aeternam. Ibi de divina natura loquitur. Item dominum gloriae crucifixerunt, de idiomate humanitatis loquitur.” This passage is excerpted from the third argument, recorded in the published transcripts of the public debate.

This text embodies the descriptive tension, which lies at the center of the question treated throughout this chapter. On the one hand, Luther seems to endorse a two way communication of attributes by suggesting that the property of ‘being crucified’ is “attributed to both *natures*.”⁷⁹ On the other hand, this endorsement is forcefully overturned by restrictive statements, which limit Christ’s ‘being crucified’ exclusively to His humanity. What can be made of this internal variegation?

The tension appears again in the second half of the fifth argument, as recorded in the disputation’s published transcripts.

“Question: It is asked, whether this proposition is true: The Son of God, the creator of heaven and earth, the eternal Word, cries out from the Cross and is a man?”

“Response: This is true, because what the man cries, God also cries out, and to crucify the Lord of glory is impossible according to the divinity, but it is possible according to the humanity; but because of the unity of the person, this being crucified is attributed to the divinity as well.”⁸⁰

A divergence interpretation of this text will, no doubt, call attention to the fact that Luther ascribes ‘being crucified’ to Christ’s divinity. The text, however, cannot easily be reduced to this emphasis. One must account for conspicuous use of *secundum quid* qualifiers, which designate the nature according to which a particular predication is valid. If Luther means to expunge the doctrine of divine impassibility, why retain such semantic restrictions at all? Is his point simply to acknowledge that the divine nature can’t suffer on its own, but only suffers once united with the humanity of Christ?

⁷⁹Emphasis mine.

⁸⁰Brown translation. WA 39/II, 103a. “Quaestio: Quaeritur, an illa propositio sit vera: Filius Dei, creator coeli et terrae, verbum aeternum, clamat in cruce et est homo? Responsio: Est vera, quia quod clamat homo, clamat etiam Deus, et crucifigi dominum gloriae est impossibile secundum divinitatem, est autem possibile secundum humanitatem, sed quia est unitas personae, illud crucifigi tribuitur etiam divinitati.”

Such a ‘diachronic’ rendering fails to comport, though, with the thrust of Luther’s rejoinder to Caspar Schwenckfeld. In this rejoinder, the mechanics of semantic specification are enlisted to demonstrate the legitimacy of ascribing human attributes to Christ while retaining the unaltered integrity of the divine nature (I.E. God’s abiding non-creatureliness). When the same qualificatory pattern is applied to the present context, it becomes clear that it is the divinity *of Christ* that Luther has in mind, when he states that ‘being crucified’ is “*impossible* according to the divinity”⁸¹. He is not simply conceding the point that ‘pre-incarnate deity’ cannot suffer and die.⁸² Luther’s use of traditional restrictive qualifications denotes an ongoing commitment to the doctrine of divine impassibility.

The core of the 1540 disputation rests finally, as in the case of the 1528 “Confession concerning Christ’s Supper” and the sermons on John from the late 1530’s, upon the ascription of human properties to the single *person* of Christ.⁸³ The purpose of Luther’s enlisted specificatory discourse is to identify the nature according to which ascriptions are valid. The resultant ‘partitive analysis’ also makes it abundantly clear that descriptive characterizations of Christ do not necessarily apply symmetrically to each of Christ’s two natures. Many predicates, which are true of Christ as human, are decidedly *not* true of Christ as divine.

To this point, the present section has argued in favor of a ‘non-divergence’ reading of Luther’s 1540 disputation on the basis of two main factors. In the first place,

⁸¹That is, the referent is not the pre-incarnate divine Son, but the incarnate Christ. Emphasis mine.

⁸²After all, Luther’s response to Schwenckfeld is not that pre-incarnate divinity is not a creature. Such an argument would only confirm the semantic suspicions that Luther set out to allay.

⁸³That is, the tensions that proceed from the juxtaposition of traditional qualificatory discourse beside an apparent endorsement of a two-way exchange between natures.

this interpretation comports with the grain of Luther's response to Caspar Schwenckfeld. His response does not depend upon a diachronic ontological shift within the nature of deity, but focuses instead upon the *person* of Christ as the one proper recipient of all property ascriptions. Second, a non-divergence interpretation makes clearer sense of Luther's prolific use of *secundum quid* qualifiers. These qualifiers register his ongoing commitment to the unaltered integrity of the divine nature as non-creaturely and impassible, before *and after* the event of the incarnation.

In addition to these considerations, there is a third compelling source of counter-evidence, which has not yet been the direct object of this chapter's examination. It consists in Luther's employment in the disputation of the distinction between abstract and concrete predication, which represents a second means of semantic qualification. The importance of this distinction is highlighted by its conspicuous frequency of appearance in the opening series of theses.⁸⁴

"1. This is the catholic faith, that we confess one Lord Jesus Christ, true God and man."

"2. From this truth of the double substance and the unity of the person follows the communication of attributes [communicatio idiomatum], as it is called."

"3. So that those things which pertain to man are rightly said of God, and, on the other hand, those things which pertain to God are said of man."

"4. It is true to say: This man created the world, and this God suffered, died, was buried, etc."

"5. But these are not correct in the abstract (as it is said) of human nature [in abstractis humanae naturae]."

"6. For it cannot be said, Christ is thirsty, a servant, dead; therefore he is thirst, servitude, death."

"7. Wherefore this [statement] too is condemned: Christ is humanity, even though it is said: Christ is divinity."

"8. Even though man and humanity are otherwise synonyms, as are God and divinity."

"9. In the divine predicates or attributes there is not a difference of this kind between the concrete and the abstract."⁸⁵

⁸⁴A smaller portion of these theses has already been surveyed in the previous chapter.

⁸⁵Brown's translation. WA 39/ II, 93. "1. Fides catholica haec est, ut unum dominum Christum confiteamur verum Deum et hominem. 2. Ex hac veritate geminae substantiae et unitate personae sequitur

Theses four and five of this series demonstrate the importance of the distinction between abstract and concrete predication for ascertaining Luther's conception of divine passibility, because they insist rather directly that the statement "God suffered" is valid *only when spoken in the concrete*, and *not* when spoken in the abstract. What does Luther intend to emphasize by means of this distinction?⁸⁶

Divergence interpreters are accustomed to think that Luther's distinction between 'abstract' and 'concrete' description reflects the diachronic ontological shift, which conditions post-incarnate deity.⁸⁷ Suffering is not possible for the divine nature, in other words, *until* it forms a single 'concretion' together with Christ's humanity. Thus, when Luther states that God does not suffer "in the abstract", Dennis Ngien takes him to mean

illa, quae dicitur, communicatio idiomatum. 3. Ut ea, quae sunt hominis, recte de Deo et e contra, quae Dei sunt, de homine dicantur. 4. Vere dicitur: Iste homo creavit mundum et Deus iste est passus, mortuus, sepultus etc. 5. Non tamen haec rata sunt in abstractis (ut dicitur) humanae naturae. 6. Non enim dicere licet, Christus est sitiens, servus, mortuus, ergo est sitis, servitus, mors. 7. Unde et illa damnatur: Christus est humanitas, etiamsi dicatur: Christus est divinitas. 8. Licet homo et humanitas sint alias synonyma, sicut Deus et divinitas. 9. In divinis praedicatis seu idiomatibus non est differentia talis inter concreta et abstracta."

⁸⁶The distinction itself shows up rather frequently in many of Luther's other written texts. Two of the more conspicuous examples include his already mentioned sermons on the Gospel of John, and his commentary on Isaiah 53, which he composed in 1544.

⁸⁷ For instance, Kjell Ove Nilsson, *Simul das Miteinander von Göttlichem und Menschlichem in Luthers Theologie*, Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte, Bd. 17 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 255-7. Nilsson's interpretation of the distinction is clearly expressed in a summary description he provides on page 257: "Erst die unauflösliche Personeneinheit macht—in concreto—eine Vermittlung zwischen den Naturen möglich. Also: die Vermittlung ist realis, nicht nominalis; sie geschieht im genus idiomatum sowohl als auch im majestaticum und tapeinoticum." Schneider defines the concretion in terms of a dynamic union of opposites. Florian Schneider, *Christus praedicatus et creditus: die reformatorische Christologie Luthers in den Operationes in Psalmos (1519-1521), dargestellt mit beständigem Bezug zu seiner Frühzeitchristologie* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2004), 184. See also Jens Wolff, *Metapher und Kreuz: Studien zu Luthers Christusbild* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 440. Schwarz is less clear, perhaps, but also seems to assign a similarly 'diachronic' meaning to Luther's use of specificatory discourse. He acknowledges, for instance, that Luther uses the qualification 'according to the humanity', but this does not mean, in his judgment, that Luther denies the genuine suffering of the divinity. Instead, he thinks it is intended to denote the nature from whom the attribute in which both now share is properly derived. Reinhard Schwarz, "Gott ist Mensch", 311-3. The prominence of this *diachronic* hermeneutic is expressed by the fact that Paul Fiddes, a contemporary systematic theologian, simply assumes it accurately to represent Luther's rendering of divine suffering. See Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 29.

that God's being does not (and cannot) suffer *prior* to the incarnation.⁸⁸ Ngien's implicit definition of this distinction is representative, and could be condensed as follows:

Abstract Predication: Predication referring to one of Christ's natures conceived outside of, or prior to its participation within the reciprocal, ontologically conditioning relationship it shares with its counterpart in the hypostatic union.

Concrete Predication: Predication referring to one of Christ's natures as ontologically conditioned by its union with its counterpart inside the hypostatic union.⁸⁹

By adopting a version of this interpretation, Ngien sidesteps the implication that Luther's employment of the abstract/concrete distinction attenuates or restricts his apparent endorsement of divine passibility. He is, after all, only acknowledging that the genuine suffering of the divine nature comes as a result of its union with humanity, and not from within its own discrete experience. This strategy mirrors the divergence thesis' diachronic rendering of other partitive analyses, such as *secundum quid* qualifiers.⁹⁰

A 'diachronic' interpretation of Luther's differentiated specificatory analysis succeeds, however, only if their medieval provenance is entirely ignored.⁹¹ Luther's use

⁸⁸This is why we are referring to this interpretation as 'diachronic'. Ngien is aware that a stark emphasis upon this 'shift' creates awkward problems for maintaining an agential continuity between God's being and act. This is why he suggests, somewhat in the manner of Jürgen Moltmann, that the divine Son is always proleptically conditioned by the incarnation, even before the decisive ontological shift actually takes place.

⁸⁹This definition is sometimes used as a means of characterizing Luther's theological epistemology. According to this application, it is precisely knowledge of God in the 'abstract' that Luther rejects. The point represented here often carries with it a clear polemical edge. Whereas scholasticism is content simply to define God and Christ on the basis of detached speculation, Luther allows God to define Himself. He thus allows God to be *God* in God's own way, rather than imposing upon Him human philosophical projections. There is not space to address this particular extension of the divergence interpretation.

⁹⁰That is, Ngien's apparent assumption that God suffers *according to the humanity* really only means that the divine nature suffers *on account of its union with the humanity* (since prior to this union, divinity cannot suffer).

⁹¹By differentiated specificatory analysis, I refer to analysis that identifies and distills the specific reality or entity by virtue of which a given predication is deemed valid or true. Whatever interpretation of Luther's Christology one finally defends, the fact that Luther enlists such specificatory and restrictive discourse must be acknowledged and therefore *interpreted*. The crucial question is whether this discourse ought to be seen as "*diachronic*, differentiated specificatory analysis" or as "*synchronic*, differentiated

of the abstract/concrete distinction is not, in other words, a semantic device of his own innovation, but a practice he appropriates rather unambiguously from medieval discursive custom. Qualificatory mechanisms such as those treated within this chapter are employed within the medieval period as a means for testing and articulating the internal consistency of Christian belief, a project whose very impetus *presumes* the *prima facie* dissonance of divine and human predicates (E.G. passibility and impassibility).⁹² While the origins and development of the abstract/ concrete distinction, in particular, exceed the scope of the present discussion, it behooves us here to reflect briefly upon the christological application of this distinction in representative examples of late medieval discourse.⁹³

The salience of such medieval antecedents for the present section consists in the unequivocally *non-diachronic* significance their use of the abstract/concrete distinction reflects, so far as the analysis of christological predicates is concerned. The primary

specificatory analysis". The following argument will argue in favor of the latter, in light of 1) the late medieval provenance of these distinctions (I.E. Luther *obviously* has absorbed them from the medieval textbooks perused throughout his education and beyond); and 2) Luther's own explicit reflections upon this discourse; specifically the abstract/concrete distinction.

⁹² For instance, the fact that Christ is both passible and impassible is an ostensible contradiction that medieval theologians seek to avoid by specifying the restricted 'respect' according to which each predication is valid. Presumed in all this is the fact that a genuine union between divinity and humanity must preserve all of the essential attributes of the same, and this includes the humanity's intrinsic capacity to suffer, and the divinity's intrinsic incapacity to suffer. In the absence of these commitments, no qualificatory discourse would be necessary, because Christ's 'suffering' would not raise the specter of latent contradiction at all. All of this raises the question, if Luther does not share these commitments, then why would he bother so extensively with the same medieval qualificatory discourse that is begotten from them? For more on the role of qualificatory propositions in relation to establishing the non-contradictory consistency of the doctrine of the incarnation, see Allan T. Bäck, "Aquinas on the Incarnation," *New Scholasticism* 56 (1982): 127-45; and Allan T. Bäck, "Scotus on the Consistency of the Incarnation and the Trinity," *Vivarium* 36 (1998): 83-107.

⁹³ The distinction traces ultimately to the theory of predication espoused by the philosopher Aristotle whose work was re-introduced into the Western theological tradition during the early medieval period. Luther expresses his own awareness of the distinction's Aristotelian derivation in argument twelve of the transcribed debate. See WA 39/II, 108a. For more on Aristotle's views on predication, see Allan T. Bäck, *Aristotle's Theory of Predication* (Leiden: Brill, 2000). Another important instance of Luther's extended utilization of the distinction between abstract and concrete is to be found in his 1544 commentary on Isaiah 53. See WA 40/3, 707-8.

intent of the distinction's application during this period is to distinguish between those predicates, which refer to single person of Christ (concrete), and those, which denote each nature as such (abstract).⁹⁴ The fundamental purpose of this differentiation is to ensure that discrete modes of statement analysis not become jumbled with one another; a possibility that, from the vantage point of medieval theology anyways, would carry with it seriously problematic christological consequences. So far as the predication of human properties to Christ is concerned, the medievals insist that such ascriptions take place *only in the concrete*, and never in the abstract.⁹⁵

A discussion found in the work of William of Ockham is illustrative. He stipulates that, while one may licitly say that 'Christ is man' (a predication that denotes the concrete person possessing a human nature), it cannot be said that 'Christ is humanity', because 'humanity' refers to the *abstract* nature on account of which Christ (the concrete) is rightly characterized as fully human. Christ is no more to be identified with 'humanity' on account of his being human than the person of Socrates is to be identified with 'whiteness' on account of his being white.⁹⁶ Christologically, Ockham's stipulation effectively prohibits an interpretation of the abstract/ concrete distinction that hinges upon a diachronic, ontological shift. The distinction has to do with the *way* in which Christ is human, not *whether* deity is considered pre- or post-incarnation. The analysis, in other words, is clearly 'synchronic' in nature.

⁹⁴Note this application of the distinction, for instance, in Aquinas' treatment of the communication of attributes as discussed in Ernst Borchert, *Der Einfluss des Nominalismus auf die Christologie der Spätscholastik*, 40.

⁹⁵See, for instance, the manifestations of this restriction in the writings Konrad of Soltau, Petrus of Candia, Pierre, D'Ailly, Nicholas d' Oresme, and William of Ockham. *Ibid.*, 78, 98, 100, 106, 110.

⁹⁶For more on this restriction, see Marilyn McCord Adams, "Relations, Inherence and Subsistence", 68-9.

Is Luther's appropriation of the abstract/concrete distinction marshaled to an equivalent restrictive purpose? Theses six and seven of the 1540 disputation suggest an affirmative response to this question. Here, the reformer practically repeats Ockham's stipulation *verbatim*.⁹⁷ Perhaps most explicit in this regard is the published record of argument twelve that one finds in a transcribed version of the public debate.

"Argument: "Man" and "humanity" have the same meaning. Therefore it is rightly said that Christ is humanity."

"Response: This is not conceded, but rather that Christ is man, because this is a concrete term with personal signification, whereas an abstract signifies the mode of nature, or naturally, so that therefore it is false that Christ is human nature, that is, humanity, or that Christ is humanity. Aristotle says that abstract terms refer to nature, and concrete terms to a person."⁹⁸

Contra Ngien's interpretation of Luther's qualificatory discourse, this text illustrates Luther's appropriation of a medieval rendering of the abstract/concrete distinction, with its differentiation of person-oriented predicates, and nature-oriented predicates. The differentiation expressed by this distinction is clearly not a function of diachronic ontological adjustment. It refers, instead, to the internally differentiated unity of the incarnate Christ, and seeks to reflect the peculiar nature of this unity through a correspondingly differentiated mode of discourse. The distinction between abstract and concrete possesses, for Luther, an explicitly 'synchronic' significance. Thus, when he denies in thesis five that the statement "God suffered" is true in the abstract, the underlying intent is clear. He means by this qualification to ascribe 'suffering' to the

⁹⁷This is not to suggest that the point *originates* with Ockham.

⁹⁸Translation by Christopher Brown. WA 39/II, 108a. "Homo et humanitas significant idem. Ergo recte dicitur: Christus est humanitas. Responsio: Illa non conceditur, sed illa: Ergo Christus est homo, quia est hoc concretum significans personaliter, sed abstractum significat modum naturae vel naturaliter, sicut igitur falsum est: Christus est humana natura, id est, humanitas, sic Christus est humanitas. Aristoteles dicit: Abstracta sonant naturam, concreta personam."

single *person* of Christ who is both God and man. By stipulating in this same section that all predicates of the humanity may be applied to Christ only in the concrete, Luther *unambiguously proscribes* any implication that the ‘suffering of God’ in any way conditions the divinity of Christ as such. Luther’s emphasis rests again upon the single personal agency of Christ, who is the rightful recipient of all divine and human predicates. The overarching intent of this emphasis along with its accompanying qualificatory discourse is to demonstrate, just like the medieval theologians surveyed in the previous chapter, that one may affirm the mysterious realities of the incarnation without falling into contradiction, or violating the integrity of the divine nature by ascribing to it exclusively human attributes.⁹⁹

Is Luther’s use of qualificatory discourse sufficient to displace the *prima facie* evidence, which seems to evince a reciprocal doctrine of the communication of idioms? The qualifications surveyed above certainly furnish significant reason to doubt that a ‘two-way’ understanding is what Luther has in mind. The lingering riddle, however, is why Luther sometimes speaks as if there *is* a mutual sharing of attributes, even if contextual qualifications ultimately prohibit this view. This section has sought to illuminate Luther’s theological intent by attending both to the broader context of his argument, and to the specificatory discourse that accompanies its development. So long as the primary ‘divergence statements’ remain unexplained, however, there will be space for the identification of a divergence ‘strand’ within Luther’s Christology, be this strand

⁹⁹This intent is clear from what we have already observed about Luther’s primary response to Schwenckfeld’s concern that referring to Christ as a creature compromises his divinity. Luther grants the concern, but denies the simplistic semantics that fund Schwenckfeld’s criticisms. His task, in other words, is to show how traditional christological speech does not entail that divinity changes, or suffers ontological defect. The traditional speech is necessary, though, for maintaining the doctrine of the incarnation, which he suspects Schwenckfeld implicitly to deny.

ever so slender in its textual support. Once again, the decisive question hinges upon the recognition of ‘novelty’ in Luther’s language. So far as the ‘two-way’ statements are concerned, this novelty consists in Luther’s suggestion that human predicates be ascribed not simply to ‘God’, but to ‘divinity’ as well. The preceding section has suggested, in effect, that although this *sounds* like a predication, which ontologically conditions the divine nature, it actually refers to the *Person* of Christ, who is God. Is there historical warrant for such an interpretation? Are there theologians before Luther who sometimes enlist ‘nature-vocabulary’ in order to refer to predications, which *actually* apply to Christ?¹⁰⁰ The third volume of Gabriel Biel’s *Collectorium circa quattuor libros Sententiarum* provides crucial background for addressing this question.¹⁰¹

In question one of distinction seven, Biel asks whether the properties of Christ’s divine and human nature may accurately be predicated of one another other within the *communicatio idiomatum*, so long as this predication is conceived of *in the concrete*.¹⁰² Biel addresses this question in a few stages. In the first place, he reminds his reader that the ‘communication of idioms’ refers to the exchange of properties that takes place within the Person of Christ.¹⁰³ Biel continues, on the basis of this preliminary definition, to note that this exchange includes within it a mutual ascription of properties between

¹⁰⁰ In other words, do others suggest that “suffering is ascribed to divinity”, and really mean “Christ who is God suffers—I.E. God suffers”?

¹⁰¹ This discussion is to be found in Gabriel Biel, Wilfrid Werbeck, Udo Hofmann, Martin Elze, Renate Steiger, Hanns Rückert, and Volker Sievers, *Gabrielis Biel collectorium circa quattuor libros Sententiarum: Liber tertius*, 153f.

¹⁰² Ibid., 153. “*Utrum per idiomatum communicationem concreta utriusque naturae Christi, divinae scilicet et humanae, praedicantur de seinvicem vere et affirmative.*”

¹⁰³ Ibid., 154. “Quantum ad primum notandum circa istum terminum »communicationem idiomatum«, quod ‘idioma’ graece est ‘proprietas’ latine; et accipitur hic pro concreto importante proprietatem alicuius. Dicitur ergo ‘communicatio idiomatum’ communicatio proprietatum.”

Christ's two natures, all of which apply to the single suppositum, which is Christ Himself. The governing proviso, however, which constrains the meaning of this description is Biel's preliminary insistence that such mutual ascription is valid *only* 'in the concrete'. In order to illustrate his point, Biel recalls Nicholas Oresme's influential tractate on the communication of idioms. Along with Oresme, Biel affirms a 'concrete' discourse of mutual predicate ascription and furnishes several interesting examples of what such predication looks like:

"A first example: as that which, with respect to the divine nature in the concrete, that is, 'God', is predicated 'de concreto' of the human nature, that is 'man', and vice versa, it is to be said that: 'Man is God', 'God is man', 'man is eternal, infinite, creator', and etc. [It is also to be said that] 'God is temporal, corruptible, passible, mortal', and etc. Or the second example: 'Christ is God', and 'Christ is man', etc. This is spoken of concrete things, because abstract things of the natures are not predicated of one another."¹⁰⁴

This text from Biel provides a crucial hint for determining for why Luther occasionally speaks as if Christ's divine *nature* is the recipient of communicated human properties.¹⁰⁵

Like Luther, Biel refers in this text to a mutual attribution between the divine and human *natures* of Christ. He even defends the validity of statements, which advance the potentially scandalous notion that, in Christ, *God* is temporal, corruptible, passible, mortal, etc. The key for understanding these descriptions, of course, resides in Biel's

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 154 "Exemplum primi: Ut quod concretum divinae naturae, scilicet 'Deus', praedicatur de concreto humane naturae, scilicet 'homo', et e converso, dicendo: 'Homo est Deus', 'Deus est homo', 'Homo est aeternus, infinitus creator' etc., 'Deus est temporalis, corruptibilis, passibilis, mortalis' etc.—Exemplum secundi: 'Christus est Deus', 'Christus est homo' etc. Dicitur notanter »concretorum«, quia abstracta naturarum non predicantur de se invicem".

¹⁰⁵Luther's close familiarity with Biel is reflected in Phillip Melancthon's anecdotal remark that the reformer was capable of referencing entire sections of Biel's theological and pastoral writings from memory. Although Luther was by no means content with every aspect of Biel's theology, he continued to recommend his works in a number of respects even later in his life. See Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 138. What is rather clear from all this, is that Luther was deeply influenced by his study of Biel, a fact that may go some way in explaining the characteristically nominalist character of several of his late disputations.

supervisory insistence that mutual predications apply only “in the concrete”. They *really* refer, in other words, to the single acting subject (Christ) who is both God and man. What we observe in Biel, however, is the appearance of a crucial nuance in the semantics of ‘nature’. He often refers to the Person of Christ either as the divine *nature* in the concrete, or as the human *nature* in the concrete. Moreover, Biel evinces no awareness that such linguistic practice is revolutionary, or even remarkable.¹⁰⁶ The salient point, so far as interpreting Luther is concerned, is the implication that ‘divine nature’ can denote either divinity itself, or Christ the divine Person, depending upon whether this descriptive phrase is considered in the abstract, or in the concrete.

This distinction helps make sense of why Luther will occasionally speak as if there is a two-way exchange of attributes between natures even in a context whose accompanying restrictive discourse effectively proscribes such a view. Speaking in this manner does not, in itself, introduce anything fundamentally new within Luther’s treatment of the *communicatio idiomatum* when considered against the background of late medieval discourse.¹⁰⁷ Like Biel, Luther’s explicit restriction that all ascriptions of human properties to divinity refer to God *in the concrete* makes it clear that the object of

¹⁰⁶It would be worthwhile, in a future study, to chart the origins of this descriptive pattern. For present purposes, it suffices to observe that referring to Christ as ‘divinity in the concrete’ appears in the work of a late medieval theologian with whose writings Luther was intimately familiar.

¹⁰⁷Are there any direct indications in Luther’s discussion that he accepts such a nuanced distinction? In argument fifteen of the public debate, Luther responds to the argument that, because Moses asserts God to be *one*, that Christ must therefore not be divine. In order to devalidate this syllogism, Luther reinforces the classical distinction between one divine essence, and three divine persons. As a means of illustrating this distinction, however, Luther returns to the question of divine suffering, and asserts the following. “Cum ergo dicitur: Divinitas est mortua, tunc includitur, quod etiam pater et Spiritus sanctus sint mortui. Sed hoc non est verum, quia tantum una persona divinitatis, sed filius est natus, mortuus et passus etc. *Ideo natura divina, quando capitur pro persona*, est nata, passa, mortua etc., hoc est verum. Est ergo distinguendum. Si intelligis divinam naturam pro tota divinitate seu unitate, tunc argumentum est falsum, quia solus Christus non est tota trinitas, sed tantum una persona trinitatis. WA 39/ II, 110a. Emphasis mine. Although not nearly as clear as the passage translated by Biel, this text furnishes at least one instance in which Luther explicitly admits using the language of ‘divine nature’ when the intended referent is actually ‘persona’.

reference is always the one person of Christ, and never the divine nature as such. By acknowledging this point, even the previously acknowledged *prima facie* warrant for a divergence interpretation of Luther's christological language effectively erodes away.

Conclusion to Chapter 3

In the course of this chapter, we have argued that the textual evidence adduced in favor of a divergence reading of Luther's doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* fails adequately to defend its claim that the reformer endorses a participatory suffering of the divine *nature* of Christ. Most of the textual evidence directed in support of this claim relies upon a false identification of novelty within Luther's preferred modes of christological description. Because of this mistaken identification, divergence interpreters often attach an inordinate degree of significance to texts whose contents turn out to be rather mundane once situated within the discursive landscape of Luther's intellectual environment. A case in point is Luther's mere ascription of human properties 'to God', which is frequently vested with revolutionary theological import. A divergence appraisal of such texts egregiously overlooks the fact that such ascriptions had been the well-worn semantic custom of mainstream christological reflection for over a millennium before Luther's birth.

A far smaller assemblage of textual loci do seem to lend *prima facie* support for a divergence interpretation of Luther's Christology. Upon closer investigation, however, even these texts have been shown specifically to proscribe the suffering of Christ's divine nature as such. In the analysis of these texts, it has been crucial to note that Luther's novel tendency to describe a mutual communication of attributes between Christ's natures, actually possesses important precedent in the work of Gabriel Biel, a late

medieval scholastic with whose work Luther was intimately familiar. Luther's prolific use of the distinction between abstract and concrete predication (and *secundum quid* *qualifiers*) makes it abundantly clear that, despite whatever occasional ambiguities may exist in his descriptive vocabulary, his intent is consistently to affirm the single subjectivity of Christ as the rightful recipient of predicates belonging to the divinity and humanity. In expressing this intent, Luther specifically rejects any notion that the divine nature is directly conditioned by the human properties of Christ. He prohibits this implication by enlisting characteristically *medieval* qualificatory discourse. God suffers, for Luther, only in the sense that the one person who is both God and man, suffers on account of His genuine humanity. In light of all this, the widely accepted divergence interpretation of Luther's doctrine of the communication of idioms must be rejected. So far as the suffering of God is concerned, Luther's writings evince fundamental agreement with the patristic and medieval authors who precede him.

Concluding Reflections on Luther's Alleged Christological Divergence

The past two chapters of this study have sought to address two very specific questions: 1) Does Luther reject or retain the medieval conception of Christ's divine-human person in terms of suppositional carrying?; and 2) Does Luther endorse or proscribe a two-way doctrine of the communication of attributes between natures in which the divine *nature* of Christ suffers along with the humanity?¹⁰⁸ Recent literature on Luther's Christology often presupposes an answer to these questions, which points rather

¹⁰⁸Its intent is not, in other words, to ask whether Luther's theology comports with medieval norms in every respect. Such a task would involve a vast array of concerns, and, as such, falls outside the scope of this chapter. Accordingly, the argument for continuity here is neither comprehensive nor necessarily programmatic. Its focus rests entirely upon the issues distilled above.

decisively in the direction of a divergence reception of his thought. According to this view, Luther loosens the shackles of the classically developed doctrine of God by executing a two-fold reconfiguration of traditional Christology. The adjustments are deemed necessary, in retrospect, in order to affirm the passionate involvement of God within the events of salvation history.

In its attempt to assess the allegation of two-fold christological reconfiguration, chapters two and three have capitalized upon the fact that most important proponents of a divergence view readily concede that broad swaths of Luther's writing reproduce decidedly traditional views on the matters in question. Because of this concession, the preceding discussion has occupied itself almost exclusively with specific texts adduced by scholars as sites of unambiguous deviation, either with respect to his conception of the hypostatic union, or as it pertains to the communication of attributes. The last two chapters have demonstrated that even *these* texts evince a robust continuity with characteristic late medieval christological intent, as expressed in the heuristically distilled four *desiderata* provided in chapter two. Like his medieval predecessors, Luther enlists the doctrine of suppositional carrying in his attempt to speak intelligibly (albeit analogically) about the doctrine of the incarnation in a way that avoids fundamental contradiction, and guards against compromising the integrity of Christ's impassible divinity.

All this being the case, it must be concluded that a divergence interpretation of Luther's Christology lacks substantive evidentiary warrant. On the contrary, it may be affirmed: 1) that Luther *retains* the doctrine of suppositional carrying; and 2) that Luther *rejects* the attribution of Christ's suffering to the divine nature. This twofold conclusion

is significant on its own historical terms. It is also important, however, because it represents a fundamental destabilization of many, long-standing appropriations of Luther's Christology within contemporary reflection. An analysis of the implication that attends this destabilization must await discussion in chapter five. The following chapter turns its attention to the way in which Luther's commitment to divine impassibility fits within the fabric of his soterio-logic.

ONLY THE IMPASSIBLE GOD CAN HELP: LUTHER ON THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST AND THE INVIGORATION OF HUMAN DEBILITY

Although divergence thesis is based upon the identification of a *christological* adjustment in Luther's writings, this alleged adjustment has at its axis a decidedly *soteriological* orientation. When harmonized in relation to one another, the result is a programmatic, hermeneutical symmetry: 1) a re-engineered doctrine of the hypostatic union, which *admits* the suffering of Christ's divinity; and 2) a correspondent soteriological vision, which *requires* this admission. This doctrinal alignment purports to identify a crucial synthetic continuity within Luther's thought, and thus a means for perceiving its underlying conceptual commitments.¹ Thus enlisted, the 'passibilist symmetry' has proven, in the course of numerous books, essays, and articles, to possess remarkable explanatory appeal for those seeking to make broad sense of Luther's overall significance within the stream of Christian theological development. The result of its widespread application, is the now broadly accepted view that Luther represents an early hinge point in the development of modern theologies of divine suffering; a harbinger of the many 20th century theologians who would later seek to denude the Christian doctrine of God of its purportedly pagan accretions.²

The previous chapters have disrupted the first half of the operative 'passibilist symmetry'. They refuted the notion that Luther recalibrates the doctrine of the hypostatic

¹ That is, the notion that Luther recalibrates traditional Christology *for the sake* of a passibilist soteriology. This notion is 'synthetic' because it proposes a way of relating various aspects of Luther's theology together with one another. This differs from previous chapters, which treated questions of a more circumscribed nature, without asking the *why* question in so direct a manner.

²For one example of how Luther is interpreted as part of the 'pre-history' for these recent developments, see Victor Keding, "Wider das Apathieaxiom: Die theopaschitische Christologie des späten Elert und ihre Wirkungsgeschichte", in *Mit dem Menschen verhandeln über den Sachgehalt des Evangeliums: die Bedeutung der Theologie Werner Elerts für die Gegenwart*, hrsg. Keller, Rudolf, and Michael Roth (Erlangen: Martin-Luther-Verlag, 2004), 83.

union in order to procure the suffering of Christ's divine nature. The present chapter turns to the symmetry's second half, and asks whether Luther's conception of Christ's saving work includes an endorsement of divine passibility. Does God become genuinely *vulnerable* in the redeeming work of Christ according to Luther's conception? Is *divine* vulnerability necessary for this work to succeed in its purported task? In the course of pursuing these matters, the following discussion seeks to refute the claim that Luther's soteriology evinces a commitment to divine passibility. It argues ultimately that the passibilist doctrinal alignment, which resides at the axis of the divergence thesis actually inverts the logic of Luther's soteriology, and thus fails as an accurate characterization of his thought. In order to redeem sinful human beings in the midst of their suffering, Luther insists that Christ must be wholly *incorruptible* on account of his divine nature, and thus finally *invulnerable* to the destructive powers, which fall upon Him during the course of His passion.

The argument of this chapter unfolds in three progressive stages. The first seeks to situate the specific locus of divine suffering within the larger macro-structure of Luther's christocentric soteriology. This preliminary exercise is included in order to locate Luther's reflection upon the redemptive sufferings of Christ within the larger topography of his thought. This task allows the subsequent investigation of divine suffering within Luther's thought to proceed with the requisite focus needed either to refute or verify the divergence interpretation.³ The second section of the chapter presents and evaluates a

³This 'location' is also necessary, lest the specific focus of this chapter leave the unintended implication that Luther's view of God's suffering lies at the heart of his doctrine of salvation. By exploring this question, in other words, we are not seeking to identify the central emphasis of Luther's theology, nor even narrate the whole of his soteriology. In the opinion of the present author, Luther's understanding of Christ places its emphasis primarily elsewhere. However, none of this alters the fact that Luther *does* address the matter of divine suffering, and believes this question to be an important aspect of soteriological

divergence rendering of Luther's soteriology. This evaluation addresses the crucial question of whether certain of Luther's soteriologically oriented texts express a clear endorsement of Christ suffering *according to His divinity*, as so many of his modern interpreters are wont to claim. On the basis of a negative response to this query, the final section unfolds an alternative construal of Luther's soterio-logic, which reinforces, through consultation of pertinent texts throughout the reformer's life time, the indispensable role that the doctrine of divine impassibility (and its conceptual corollaries) fulfills within Luther's understanding of redemption.

Situating the Question: Christology and Soteriology in Luther's Thought

Embedded within the divergence notion of a 'passibilist symmetry' resides the latent, and logically prior assumption that Luther's soteriology and Christology form together a kind of reciprocally informing doctrinal inter-relation. Can such an assumption be sustained? Of course, much depends in this case upon how one defines the admittedly vague concept of a 'doctrinal inter-relation' in the first place. That Luther views salvation as inextricably bound up with the person and work of Christ hardly needs to be defended.⁴ But what is the precise nature of the relation between these doctrines for

reflection. It is the more restrictive goal of this chapter to ascertain: 1) what redemptive 'divine suffering' denotes for him; and 2) how this relates to the broader themes of his soteriological vision.

⁴That such a coordination exists is, moreover, a claim that enjoys broad scholarly support within modern Luther scholarship. A few examples of this claim are available in Ulrich Asendorf, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers nach seinen Predigten*. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 62; Hans-Martin Barth, *Der Teufel und Jesus Christus in der Theologie Martin Luthers*, Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte, Bd. 19. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1967), 35; Sammeli Juntunen, "The Christological Background of Luther's Understanding of Justification" *Seminary Ridge Review* 5:2 (2003): 21; and Dorothea Vorländer, *Deus incarnatus: die Zweinaturenchristologie Luthers bis 1521*, Untersuchungen zur Kirchengeschichte, Bd. 9 (Witten: Luther-Verlag, 1974), 11. Vorländer also cites a helpful list of others who articulate some version of this conviction on page 11, note 2. As subsequent discussion will demonstrate, we have no interest in seeking to overturn the legitimacy of this broad affirmation. The question under consideration is how this coordination is to be parsed in relation to Luther's understanding of the suffering of God.

Luther? In what specific ways does he tailor christological inquiry in order for it to comport with his own account of the salvation that Christ achieves? Space naturally precludes any comprehensive treatment of this question. A cursory overview, however, will provide a conceptual map upon which the subsidiary matter of God's suffering can be located.

At the heart of Luther's joint reflection upon Christology and soteriology is the theme of redemptive *union*. Christ and the Christian are baked together into one cake.⁵ They form together a redemptive union, which is procured through living faith, and nourished by Word and sacrament. Theological reflection upon this union naturally proceeds in one of two directions. In the first place, because salvation is identified as union *with Christ*, it inevitably encourages a decidedly 'objective' focus upon Christ Himself (I.E. 1. *who* He is; 2. *what* He has done; and 3. *why* it is, on account of all this, that participation in and with Him conveys salvation to the believer). The theme of union also invites reflection upon the specific *means* through which the Christian comes to participate in Christ and thus appropriate His redemptive benefits. One detects the core centrality of this union theme in an oft-referenced remark from Luther's 1535 preface to a series of published Galatians lectures originally delivered in 1519.

"For in my heart there rules this one doctrine, namely, faith in Christ. From it, through it, and to it all my theological thought flows and returns, day and night; yet I am aware that all I have grasped of this wisdom in its height, width, and depth are a few poor and insignificant first fruits and fragments"⁶.

⁵See Ian D. Kingston Siggins, *Martin Luther's Doctrine of Christ*, Yale Publications in Religion, 14 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 156.

⁶LW 27, 145. WA 40/I, 33. "Nam in corde meo iste unus regnat articulus, scilicet Fides Christi, ex quo, per quem et in quem omnes meae diu noctuque fluunt et refluunt theologicae cogitationes, nec tamen comprehendisse me experior de tantae altitudinis, latitudinis, profunditatis sapientia nisi infirmas et pauperes quasdam primitias et veluti fragmenta."

Texts like this one express rather vividly the christocentric nature of Luther's self-understanding as a theologian. The emphasis in this text does not rest solely upon Christ *per se*. It calls attention, rather, to the *faith* through which the Christian relates *to Christ*. This does not indicate any eschewal on Luther's part of rigorous dogmatic description. It simply illustrates that Luther felt it important always to reflect upon *both* the subjective and objective elements of salvation as they exist in relation to one another.⁷ This explains why it is that Luther so often commends the necessity of two-nature Christology on decidedly soteriological grounds. For Him, Christ *must* be both fully human and fully divine, because otherwise, the life, death and resurrection of Christ are of no redemptive benefit.⁸ Insofar as these considerations legitimate the identification of an inter-doctrinal 'symmetry' within Luther's theology, then the divergence interpretation's methodological point of departure can be affirmed as legitimate. The inter-dependency of Christology and soteriology within Luther's thought renders it perfectly reasonable to triangulate Luther's understanding of divine suffering along *both* doctrinal axes.

⁷By 'subjective' I refer to the means through which the Christian enters into salvific union with Christ. Objective, on the other hand, refers directly to Christ's person and work considered on its own terms. There exists a tendency in some scholarship to suggest that Luther only *really* cares about the subjective elements, and views reflection upon Christ *per se* as entirely worthless. The textual basis for such a claim is Luther's oft-expressed conviction that understanding of Christ *per se* is not sufficient *soteriologically*. This point falls well short, however, of the subjectivism Luther is alleged to insist upon. To conclude from these statements that Luther has no time for objectively-focused christological inquiry is unconvincing on its own terms, and blatantly ignores the fact, demonstrated in the previous chapters, that Luther *does* engage in such discourse elsewhere in his writing. In terms of the theological implications of this perennial bifurcation, Walter Kasper is surely correct when he states: "The choice between an ontological and a functional Christology is therefore, theologically speaking, illusory and a position into which theology must not allow itself to be manoeuvred." Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (London: Burns & Oates, 1976), 24. It is to Kasper's credit that he acknowledges Luther's retention of an objective focus, despite the many theologians who espouse a 'pro nobis soteriological reductionism'. See his discussion of Luther on page 22.

⁸One way of describing the task of this chapter, would be to summarize that it is occupied with specifying *why* and *how* the suffering Christ must be *divine* for Luther. The divergence interpretation supplies its own treatment of this question, which will be scrutinized in the second section. In the third section, we will furnish a better alternative. Lest such an argument be recruited too hastily as evidence of a soteriological reductionism in Luther's theology, we will do well to recall that many patristic authors argue a similar point in defense of orthodox trinitarian theology.

It bears mentioning as a precaution against overstatement here that Luther's tandem conceptualization of Christ and redemption is not so radically 'unique' a feature of his theological *modus operandi* as is often supposed. The mere fact that such a relational coordination exists within his thought must not be enlisted too hastily in the service of sharply drawn, trans-historical contrast. Theologians of the patristic period, for instance, are often guided by a decidedly soteriological orientation, which many scholars have observed to be *instrumental* in the early formulations of conciliar dogma.⁹ Despite semi-conventional denigrations to the contrary, it must *also* be acknowledged that medieval reflection upon the person of Christ is characterized by a similar attentiveness to soteriological desiderata.¹⁰ It cannot be imagined, as is sometimes alleged, that mainstream christological discourse immediately prior to Luther had somehow deteriorated into little more than an arcane and rigidly speculative 'logical problem', wholly abstract in its focus and thus hermetically detached from any real soteriological concern.¹¹ Scholars who assume this to be the case will only propagate what must finally

⁹On the formation of dogma in the patristic period, see Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); John Behr, *The Nicene Faith* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004); R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988); Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); John Anthony McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: The Christological Controversy: Its History, Theology, and Texts* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994). Representative of this sensibility is the well-known dictum, "What God has not assumed, He has not redeemed" that guides various layers of christological reflection during the patristic period.

¹⁰For sustained reflection upon of this soterio-christological inter-relation in the medieval period, see Marilyn McCord Adams, *What Sort of Human Nature?: Medieval Philosophy and the Systematics of Christology*, The Aquinas lecture (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1999). Another source that illustrates this inter-relation, though confined to the Christology of Bonaventure is Zachary Hayes, *The Hidden Center: Spirituality and Speculative Christology in St. Bonaventure* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981).

¹¹The indictment against scholastic theology expressed in this description goes some distance in explaining how the characteristically *medieval* portions of Luther's late christological writings have often been interpreted with a decidedly *non-medieval* hermeneutical lens (with the salient exception of Graham White). If scholasticism is presumed to entail the sort of theological discourse described by the above-

be regarded as an inordinately severe and untenable distortion of medieval theology. The descriptive hazard created by this distortion, so far as Luther scholarship is concerned, is that it encourages an inflated account of Luther's uniqueness, and invites injudicious adjudications of the way in which the reformer's self-avowed christocentrism is really significant.¹²

The perils of overdrawn trans-historical contrast should not, of course, be exchanged for the equally misleading implication that Luther's christo-soteriological intent coincides seamlessly with all those who precede him. He undoubtedly differs, for instance, regarding *what* salvation precisely entails, and *why* or *how* the person and work of Christ are uniquely able to procure it.¹³ How best to identify and interpret these differences in any comprehensive manner is not a task that falls with the scope of this chapter. Its sole concern is rather to ascertain whether one *aspect* of the uniqueness that belongs to Luther's construal of these matters consists in a soteriologically motivated rejection of divine impassibility. Divergence interpreters are correct to assume that such a

described caricature, then it becomes nearly impossible to imagine that Luther could make any constructive use of its descriptive tools. For more on how such a bias has shaped the study of Luther's Christology, see the following chapter.

¹²Among the exaggerations this mode of description can encourage are the following: 1) That Luther's Christology simply *is* soteriology (that is, that Luther really doesn't reflect upon christological questions, but is *exclusively* concerned with matters soteriological); and 2) That Luther is the first person in hundreds of years to think that Christ is soteriologically important. Like Schwarz's harsh presentation of suppositional carrying criticized in the previous chapters, the grim notion of medieval Christology as *purely* speculative and non-soteriologically-oriented creates a historically inaccurate picture of pre-reformation theology in order to furnish a convenient foil for Luther's revolutionary genius.

¹³Of course, we must remind ourselves here that patristic and medieval theologians are also *internally* differentiated on these matters, so the fact that Luther renders things likewise in his own creative manner should not be taken *ipso facto* as evidence of some kind of architectonic ground shift in his thought. Luther must be extended the courtesy of differing without *rebell*ing and appropriating with *parrot*ing. The fact that Luther is sometimes afforded no space for theological nuance is undoubtedly a function of his looming significance in the history of western Christianity. The present study does not mean to suggest that this perceived significance is misplaced—as if the reformation was all just one colossal misunderstanding! The point is rather to insist that the *nature* of Luther's significance be carefully located, and neither fabricated nor overstated.

rejection *would* represent a major point of departure from preexisting theological norms. The question to which this chapter must attend, however, is whether this rejection really appears *in Luther*.

So far, the present section has noted that the ‘passibilist symmetry’ espoused by the divergence thesis depends upon the validity of a ‘reciprocal coordination’ between Luther’s Christology and soteriology. Although the symmetry itself remains very much in question, the underlying coordination provides a legitimate point of entry into Luther’s understanding of Christ’s redemptive suffering.¹⁴ The divergence interpretation seeks to direct and mold the theological significance of this inter-doctrinal coordination in a very particular way. It does so by culling to the foreground Luther’s alleged endorsement of *divine suffering*, and identifying this endorsement specifically as an essential element of his theological vision. Accordingly, the divergence interpretation narrates the relational coordination between Christology and soteriology in Luther’s thought as follows:

1. The divine nature of Christ *must* suffer in order for human beings to receive true salvation.
2. Therefore, the divine nature of Christ *can* and *does* suffer.

The goal of the second section will be to adjudicate whether such a construal can count as plausible. Before doing so, the present section must provide a clearer specification of how the sufferings of Christ fit within the broader framework of Luther’s soteriological vision. This synthetic vantage point will make it possible to evaluate the role, if any, that Luther assigns to the suffering of Christ’s *divinity*.

The recurrent patterns of Luther’s soteriological vision find an important vehicle of descriptive integration in his oft-enlisted metaphor of a ‘joyful exchange’ between

¹⁴In other words, the present study affirms the identification of this coordination, even if it qualifies it customary description with a few significant caveats. See above.

Christ and the believer.¹⁵ Recent scholarship especially has recognized and called attention to the importance of this metaphor as an enduring element of Luther's theological vocabulary.¹⁶ The image itself emphasizes that a redemptive sharing of attributes joins Christ to human sinners who participate in Him through faith. Christ takes upon Himself all of the sin, death, curse, and punishment of sinful flesh, and imparts to Christians all righteousness, life and innocence. What previously belonged exclusively to the former, now applies equally to the latter, and vice versa. Creative elaborations of this exchange pattern literally pervade Luther's writings from the beginning of his career to its end. By far the best-known instance appears in Luther's 1520 treatise "On the Freedom of a Christian".¹⁷

¹⁵This is not to negate the tremendous flexibility attending Luther's usage of this metaphor, as subsequent discussion will explicitly acknowledge.

¹⁶Among the most important studies are: Uwe Rieseke-Braun, *Duellum mirabile: Studien zum Kampfmotiv in Martin Luthers Theologie*, Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte, Bd. 73 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999); and Walter Allgaier, *Der "froehliche Wechsel" bei Martin Luther; eine Untersuchung zu Christologie und Soteriologie bei Luther unter besonderer Beruecksichtigung der Schriften bis 1521*, Dissertation (Erlangen-Nürnberg, 1966). Another chapter treatment of Luther's use of this theme is available in Raymund Schwager, *Der wunderbare Tausch: zur Geschichte und Deutung der Erlösungslehre* (München: Kösel, 1986). Theobald Beer also provides copious citations, which demonstrate the importance of this image throughout Luther's lifetime, although the present author strongly disagrees with the manner in which Beer seeks to interpret Luther's soteriology. Theobald Beer, *Der fröhliche Wechsel und Streit: Grundzüge der Theologie Luthers* (Leipzig: St. Benno-Verlag, 1974). This chapter will assume what each of these books amply demonstrates, namely, that Luther's soteriology is often expressed in terms of a joyful exchange, and that the metaphor itself furnishes something like an organizational nerve center for Luther's understanding of redemption.

¹⁷The Latin version of this description is available in WA 7, 54-5. "Tertia fidei gratia incomparabilis est haec, Quod animam copulat cum Christo, sicut sponsam cum sponso. Quo sacramento (ut Apostolus docet) Christus et anima efficiuntur una caro. Quod si una caro sunt verumque inter eos matrimonium, immo omnium longe perfectissimum consumatur, cum humana matrimonia huius unici figurae sint tenues, Sequitur, et omnia eorum communia fieri tam bona quam mala, ut, quaecunque Christus habet, de iis tanquam suis praesumere et gloriari possit fidelis anima, Et quaecunque animae sunt, ea sibi arroget Christus tanquam sua. Conferamus ista, et videbimus inaestimabilia. Christus plenus est gratia, vita et salute, Anima plena est peccatis, morte et damnatione. Intercedat iam fides, et fiet, ut Christi sint peccata, mors et infernus, Animae vero gratia, vita et salus: oportet enim eum, si sponsus est, ea simul quae sponsa habet acceptare et ea quae sua sunt sponsae impartire. Qui enim corpus suum et se ipsum illi donat, quomodo non omnia sua donat? Et qui corpus sponsae accipit, quomodo non omnia quae sponsae sunt accipit? Hic iam dulcissimum spectaculum prodit non solum communionis sed salutaris belli et victoriae et salutis et redemptionis. Cum enim Christus sit deus et homo eaque persona, quae nec peccavit nec moritur nec damnatur, sed nec peccare, mori, damnari potest, Eiusque iustitia, vita, salus insuperabilis, aeterna,

In this text, Luther likens the union of Christ and the believing Christian to the nuptial bond that unites husband and wife. Just as the material possessions carried into marriage become the shared ‘property’ of both spouses, so is it between Christ and those who live in union with Him through faith. Luther expands upon the specific soteriological entailments of this analogy at some length. The following excerpt is representative.

“Accordingly the believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has as though it were its own, and whatever the soul has Christ claims as his own. Let us compare these and we shall see inestimable benefits. Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let faith come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ’s, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul’s; for if Christ is a bridegroom, he must take upon himself the things which are his bride’s and bestow upon her the things that are his. If he gives her his body and very self, how shall he not give her all that is his? And if he takes the body of the bride, how shall he not take all that is hers?”¹⁸

The spiritual goods detailed in this text as the substance of redemptive exchange do not represent anything like an exhaustive or determinate list, which consistently appear in all other instantiations of the metaphor throughout Luther’s career. There exists, rather, a remarkable diversity in Luther’s extension of the exchange motif; a fact on whose basis Uwe Riesko-Braun rightly cautions against any facile reduction of this metaphor’s meaning to a single, abiding trajectory of emphasis.¹⁹ The pluripotent fecundity of the

omnipotens est, Cum, inquam, talis persona peccata, mortem, infernum sponsae et propter annulum fidei sibi communia, immo propria facit et in iis non aliter se habet quam si sua essent ipseque peccasset, laborans, moriens et ad infernum descendens, ut omnia superaret, peccatumque, mors et infernus eum absorbere non possent, necessario in ipso absorpta sunt stupendo duello. Nam iustitia sua omnium peccatis superior, vita sua omni morte potentior, salus sua omni inferno invictior. Ita fit anima fidelis per arram fidei suae in Christo, sponso suo, omnibus peccatis libera, a morte secunda et ab inferno tuta, donata aeterna iustitia, vita, salute sponsi sui Christi. Sic exhibet sibi sponsam sine macula et ruga gloriosam, mundans eam lavacro in verbo vitae, id est per fidem verbi, vitae, iustitiae et salutis. Sic sponsat eam sibi in fide, in misericordia et miserationibus, in iustitia et iudicio, ut Oseae 2. dicit.” English translation for this passage is available in LW 31, 351-2.

¹⁸ LW 31, 351.

¹⁹For a sense of the range of emphasis available to Luther through this metaphor, see the following studies: Uwe Rieske-Braun, *Duellum mirabile*; Walter Allgaier, *Der "froehliche Wechsel" bei Martin Luther; eine Untersuchung zu Christologie und Soteriologie bei Luther unter besonderer*

image affords Luther an impressive range of possible soteriological applications, and thus nicely accommodates the situation-specific malleability of his theological style.²⁰

Despite this diversity, however, the metaphor of the joyful exchange may be divided into two essential christological components: 1) The real condescension of Christ *into* the condition of sinful humanity; and 2) the real exaltation of the Christian with Christ *from* the condition of sinful humanity.²¹ At least this much is necessary in order for Luther's notion of a mutual exchange to possess any validity. Insofar as Christ is said to be united with sinners, He must enter fully into the depth of humanity's plight, and appropriate it existentially as His own. The radical condescension this entails is a function of the fact that Christ, the bridegroom, shares in *all* things that belong to His bride, the company of believers united to Him. Insofar as this union is *redemptive*, however, Christ must also emerge victorious from the depths of human suffering, condemnation and death, and translate all that pertains to His post-resurrection mode of human existence to those united with Him through faith. The christological shape of redemption for Luther is thus 'parabolic.' Becoming like humanity in all things, Christ, the Son of God descends into the depths of sin's abyss. From this low estate, however, He emerges triumphant, and ascends into glory along with those who, through faith, live

Beruecksichtigung der Schriften bis 1521 (Dissertation: Erlangen-Nürnberg, 1966); Carl Heinz Ratschow, "Christologie und Rechtfertigung : Luthers Christologie nach seinen Disputationen", in *Iustificatio impii* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Teologisen Kirjallisuusseura, 1977): 204-226.

²⁰This semi-non-determinate malleability is partially the cause of long-standing debates within Luther scholarship over how best to characterize Luther's soteriology. For a very helpful overview of these debates, see Uwe Rieske-Braun, *Duellum mirabile*, 23-65; and Hans-Martin Barth, *Der Teufel und Jesus Christus in der Theologie Martin Luthers*, 50-73. Part of the problem with many aspects of the debates described in these books is the reductive presupposition that many of its participants share; namely, that Luther's soteriology *must* finally be distilled into a single, governing point of emphasis.

²¹This is an exaltation, of course, in which Luther insists the believing Christian genuinely to participate.

in union with Him. Christ conquers sin, death, and Hell, as it were, from the inside out. He plunges into the dark depths of human misery, and only thus defeats it. In His glorious resurrection, Christ openly divests the principalities of their counterfeit power. They expend themselves in an attempt to extinguish Him, and yet He rises up in unqualified triumph, crushing them beneath His feet.

The soteriological ‘parabola’ just described raises interesting questions about Luther’s Christology. For instance, how is it that Christ can enter so fully into the pits of human misery? In what precise *way* does He do so? Also, what are the underlying christological mechanics that explain for Luther why Christ does not *remain*, languishing in the abyss, but bursts forth in unfettered victory? In order to address these questions, one must attend to the way in which Luther coordinates his so-called ‘exchange soteriology’ with two-nature Christology. In particular, it must be asked how the *divine* nature related to the self-abasement of Christ, which is so viscerally on display in the Passion narratives of the four Gospels. These are the precise questions that the divergence interpretation of Luther’s soteriology purports to answer through recourse to the previously described notion of a ‘passibilist symmetry’. This chapter’s adjudication of the legitimacy of this proposal will hinge primarily upon whether or not the ‘answer’ it generates comports adequately with pertinent textual evidence derived from Luther’s corpus. This is the task with which the following section is principally occupied.

This preliminary section has sought to situate the matter of divine suffering within the framework of Luther’s soteriology. In order to do so, we have deemed it necessary to bring this matter gradually into contextual focus through a number of progressively-organized, prefatory affirmations:

- 1) The divergence interpretation of this issue is correct to identify a close association between Luther's Christology and his soteriology, despite the fact that the historical and theological significance of this assumption has sometimes been greatly exaggerated.
- 2) The relation between these doctrines is mediated predominantly by the reformer's oft-utilized metaphor of the 'joyful exchange'.
- 3) Although pluripotent in its particular applications, this metaphor's essential shape consists in two abiding components—1) the humble solidarity of Christ in the abject condition of sinful humanity; and 2) the exalted victory of Christ over sin, death, the devil, and Hell.

The purpose of these prefatory affirmations has been to locate this chapter's focus upon God's suffering in Christ within the broad landscape of Luther's soteriological vision.

The central *quaestio* yielded by this overview concerns how best to coordinate Luther's two-fold narration of redemption, with his underlying conceptualization upon the doctrine of two natures. *Why* must Christ be divine and human to save? The following series of questions gets to the heart of the matter:

- 1) How does the divine nature relate to the 'solidarity motif' embedded within the metaphor of exchange?
- 2) What role does Christ's divinity fulfill in the suffering and death of His passion?
- 3) What are the precise soteriological 'mechanics' through which Luther deems it possible for humanity to be translated from its 'low' estate (in suffering and death) to the exalted status bestowed upon it through Christ?
- 4) What, according to him, accounts for this transition *christologically*?

The following section presents and criticizes a 'divergence construal' of these concerns.

The Redemptive Sufferings of Christ's Divinity: A Presentation and Critique of the Divergence Rendering

The proviso enunciated in the introduction of this study bears repeating. The so-called 'divergence interpretation' of Luther's Christology is *not* a monolith. The moniker of 'divergence' furnishes a convenient label for designating an otherwise variegated number of scholars and theologians whose work has served (whether intentionally or

inadvertently) to reinforce the widespread contemporary reception of Luther's Christology described at length in chapter one of this work. It does not denote a neatly delineated and internally harmonious group of scholars self-consciously laboring towards a common narrational goal. So far as the present chapter is concerned, the divergence group includes all who affirm some version of the notion that Luther's doctrine of redemption either evinces or somehow demands the essential passibility of Christ's divine nature.

Scholars who endorse such a perspective argue in its favor through a variety of different means. Rather than attend to every possible strand of this internal diversity, this section will present a conceptually organized outline of the most nuanced and outwardly explicit defenses of a divergence position. The intent of this exercise is to frame the divergence interpretation of Luther's soteriology in its clearest and most compelling form of articulation. This will make it possible subsequently to identify and evaluate the essential interpretive elements necessary either for its refutation or verification.

Outline of a Divergence Coordination of Luther's Christology and Soteriology

Conceptually basic to the divergence interpretation is the conviction that the suffering of Christ's divinity is *necessary* to Luther's soteriology. This much is clear already in what has previously been identified as the 'passibilist symmetry', which is crucial for a divergence reception of his thought. What is it about Luther's soteriology, though, that commends so specific a verdict regarding the precise *modality* of Christ's sufferings? Why *must* the suffering solidarity of Christ with human beings be parsed in such a way that the divine nature is ontologically affected? A range of potential responses to this question is available to those who defend a divergence interpretation of Luther's

theology.²² The most compelling rationale leans heavily upon the ‘solidarity motif’, which is so deeply ingrained in Luther’s soteriology.

In order for the suffering solidarity of Christ with sinners to possess its full redemptive potency, this rationale argues, Christ must be capable of suffering not simply as a man, but also *as God*. This is because a Christ impassible according to His divinity would ostensibly signify a God incapable of real condescension. If the incarnate Son remains somehow ‘untouched’ or ‘invulnerable’ in the midst of His passion, then the downward bend of Luther’s redemptive parabola would stop short of genuine intersection with its symptotic baseline. The bridegroom would thus not *really* be one in all things with His bride, because Christ would not *genuinely* share the desperate condition of human beings hopelessly entangled in the deleterious effects of their sin.²³ In short, God *must* become ‘vulnerable’, because that is precisely the estate of those He condescends to redeem.

In this way, the ‘solidarity of God’ motif presupposed by Luther’s exchange soteriology functions as a conceptual wedge, urging upon readers the intra-systemic

²²Ian Kingston Siggins contends, for instance, that it is Luther’s particular substitutionary rendering of the atonement that necessitates the disposal of divine impassibility, although he admits, somewhat grudgingly, that Luther seems never to have drawn this conclusion for himself. Ian Kingston Siggins, *Martin Luther’s Doctrine of Christ*, 241. The logic underlying Siggins’ claim is also undermined by the fact that a great many Protestant theologians embrace a substitutionary doctrine of the atonement in the 16th century, and do so without ever detecting a fundamental contradiction between this commitment and the doctrine of divine impassibility. At the very least, Siggins owes his reader a more specific account of how these two convictions combat one another.

²³It is fairly common for divergence interpreters to volley the charge of docetism against soteriologies that stop short of a passibilist solidarity. See, for instance, Marc Lienhard, *Luther, Witness to Jesus Christ: Stages and Themes of the Reformer’s Christology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1982), 175-6; 335-6. There is irony in this charge, however, since the patristic theologians responsible for identifying ‘docetism’ in the first place were themselves deeply committed to the doctrine of divine impassibility. It seems illegitimate to apply the nomenclature of ‘docetist’ in a way that cuts against its original meaning. For more on the history of the doctrine of divine impassibility in relation to patristic debates over Christology and the doctrine of God, see Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought*, The Oxford Early Christian studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

necessity for Luther to reject the doctrine of divine impassibility. It is on the basis of this fundamental rationale that the divergence thesis furnishes its passibilist interpretation of the inter-relation between Luther's Christology and soteriology. The synthetic result of this view is the identification a closely-knit reciprocal parallelism between Luther's interpretation of the *communicatio idiomatum* (the exchange of attributes between the two natures of Christ) on the one hand, and the redemptive *communicatio* or 'exchange' between Christ and the believing Christian on the other. Just as a mutual, ontologically conditioning relationship unites Christ's divinity and humanity via hypostatic union, so also is Christ *conditioned*, in both his natures, by the redemptive exchange with sinful human beings that takes place as the result of this union. In both instances, the 'communication', which stands at the center of the parallelism, is genuinely symmetrical in nature. The divinity of Christ is no less conditioned by the condescension of the incarnate Son, than believers are transformed by participation in the exaltation of Christ through faith.²⁴

The exchange motif, as interpreted by the divergence thesis, thus amounts to a kind of redemptively-oriented inversion of Christ's divine and human attributes. Divinity is brought low, so that the humanity might be raised up. Applied soteriologically, Christ, who is God, suffers and dies according to *both* natures, and a moribund human race, enmeshed in the suffering, death and corruption of sin, is healed and raised up to life immortal. What are the soteriological mechanics that account for this transition? How is it that Christ does not simply meet human beings in the mire, but also *pulls them up from*

²⁴It is important to observe the extent to which this account presumes the interpretation of Luther's Christology that the previous chapters have sought to displace. In the absence of this interpretation, the above-described parallelism simply cannot get off the ground.

it? If the second Person of the Trinity truly suffers and dies according to His divinity, why is it not the case that He simply remains dead, obliterated in the jaws of defeat?²⁵

Divergence interpreters of Luther's soteriology account for the redemptive transition at issue in these questions primarily through recourse to a mechanism of dialectical mediation. The negations of sin, death, and hell are resolved, according to this view, on the basis of a doctrine of God's ontological *historicity*.²⁶ The dialectical unfolding of God's historically mediated process of 'becoming' constitutes the underlying theological reality finally responsible for Luther's two-fold pattern of solidarity and exaltation, as interpreted by many advocates of the divergence view.²⁷ It is therefore not just the event of salvation that is 'parabolic', but God's own *being* (as expressed by and related to this event) as well. The pain and plight of fallen human beings truly *becomes* a part of the divine life. It is assumed as an ontologically conditioning, and thus constitutive aspect of God's own self-actualization.²⁸

²⁵Many modern theologians and philosophers have assigned such a meaning to the phrase 'death of God', and concluded that God, whether defined in terms of a concept or as a genuine reality, is truly annihilated as a necessary step for humanity coming of age. I have in mind especially the so-called 'left wing' of Hegelianism, which traces its lineage through Feuerbach. Luther has no room for such a perspective, however. He notes explicitly that Christ did not die in order to remain in the grave. See Luther's comments from 1544 in WA 40/3, 732.

²⁶For a list of the various scholars and theologians who credit Luther with the historicization of God's being, see the summary provided in chapter 1.

²⁷Care must be exercised to avoid an overly determinate account of what the historicity of God entails for various modern interpreters of Luther. As in contemporary theology, the term itself may be invoked in a number of different ways. In this context, we are using it to denote any view that includes within it the idea that God's being has a history that is conditioned in some way by the events of salvation history. Whether this is explained entirely in terms of a free, self-electing prolepsis as some Barthians today argue, or through Pannenberg's idea of eschatological analepsis is not important to the point we are trying to make here. These and many other views would all fall together within the general trend that divergence interpreters believe Luther to anticipate.

²⁸This interpretation of the relation between Luther's Christology and soteriology has led a number of scholars to detect conceptual resonances between Luther and G.W.F. Hegel. The question of what counts as 'Hegelian' with respect to the doctrine of God is often contested in modern theological discourse. Jürgen Moltmann, for instance, emphasizes the historicity of God's being, but has consistently rebuffed the accusation that this emphasis stems from directly Hegelian influences. For our purposes, we

The fundamental soteriological mechanics operative in a divergence interpretation of Luther's doctrine of redemption could therefore be summarized in the following manner

God becomes truly vulnerable in Christ by entering into the depths of human corruption. Christ resolves the defects of sinful existence by subsuming them within the historical process of God's own dialectically mediated self-existence. Those in union with Christ through faith are caught up, as it were, in the onward trajectory of a process, which absorbs the previously ruling negations of sin, death, and hell, and consigns them to the sublated rubble of God's trans-historical self-actualization. In Christ, God identifies His own being with sinful humanity's past and present, so that they might, in turn, share in His eschatological future.

The conceptual progression embedded within this interpretation proceeds as follows:

Guiding Principle: The radical solidarity of God as sympathetic suffering

Requisite Conceptual Sub-Structure: A Christology of divine vulnerability

Soteriological Mechanics: The dialectical historicity of God

The chief consolation for those bound up in sin, suffering and death, in other words, consists in the fact that *God* truly suffers for us, and with us. He identifies with the plight of humanity in sympathetic condescension and allows the defects of post-lapsarian finitude to condition His very being. Because He becomes frail or vulnerable as humans are, so also can those who live in union with Him hope to share in the final *telos* of God's own parabolic, trans-historical development.

This sub-section has sought to furnish a thick description of the divergence interpretation, as it has been extended by a number of its most nuanced defenders. The conceptual outline that has emerged from this exercise does not, it must be repeated,

can only document the shared trajectory many interpreters of *Luther* have identified regarding the notion of God's essential *historicity*. There are any number of theological directions in which this basic insight can be, and has been, directed. For more on Hegel's point of view, see the pertinent sections of Peter Crafts Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology: A Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Quentin Lauer, *Hegel's Concept of God* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982); and Cyril O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

apply equally to all interpreters of Luther who understand his soteriology to contain an intrinsic commitment to divine passibility. Neither can it characterize with one stroke of the descriptive brush the many contemporary theologians for whom Luther's alleged endorsement of divine suffering constitutes a major building block of their constructive reception of his work. The intent of the outline, more modestly, has been to provide an overview of the divergence interpretation of Luther's soteriology in its most explicit and conceptually developed form of articulation. The common root uniting all versions of the divergence thesis, however, is the fundamental assumption that Luther's soteriological commitments either evince or require a rejection of divine impassibility. The next subsection will explore whether or not the textual evidence adduced in the defense of this assumption is adequate.

Evaluation of the Divergence Interpretation

On what textual basis is the legitimacy of the divergence interpretation of Luther's soteriology defended? Are there specific texts in which Luther is alleged unambiguously to embrace a dei-passibilist doctrine of salvation? Without question, the text cited most frequently as evidence of this view is derived from Luther's 1539 treatise "On the Councils and the Church".

"We Christians should know that if God is not in the scale to give it weight, we, on our side, sink to the ground. I mean it this way: if it cannot be said that God died for us, but only a man, we are lost; but if God's death and a dead God lie in the balance, his side goes down and ours goes up like a light and empty scale. Yet he can also readily go up again, or leap out of the scale! But he could not sit on the scale unless he had become a man like us, so that it [sic] could be called God's dying, God's martyrdom, God's blood, and God's death. For God in his own nature cannot die; but now that God and man are united in one person, it is called God's death when the man dies who is one substance or one person with God."²⁹

²⁹LW 41, 103-4. WA 50, 590. "Denn wir Christen muessen das wissen, wo Gott nicht mit in der woge ist und das gewichte gibt, so sincken wir mit unser schuessel zu grunde, Das meine ich also: Wo es

In light of the previous sub-section's description of the divergence interpretation, it is not difficult to anticipate the way in which this text has been often enlisted in its defense.

This text clearly represents an instance what we have so far referred to as the 'solidarity motif', which is intrinsic to Luther's two-fold soteriological vision. He insists in it that *God* must condescend into the condition of sinful human beings. Creaturely death, martyrdom, and physical vulnerability all belong *to God* as the result of His solidarity with humanity. Only in this way, the logic of Luther's 'scale' metaphor insists, can believers hope to rise up *with God* from their manifold afflictions and attain to salvation. This text does not clearly identify why it is that God, unlike human beings, can enter death and yet spring up from it.³⁰ The mere fact, however, that death and other human defects are ascribed blatantly *to God* is enough for divergence interpreters definitively to conclude that Luther's soteriology demands the rejection of the classical doctrine of God's impassibility.

Dennis Ngien's comments on the 1539 text aptly illustrate such a conclusion.

"[In this text] Luther justifies his remarks on the suffering and death of God in Christ on soteriological grounds. Already in his *Church Postil* (1522), Luther says that if it is true that only the human nature suffers and the divine nature has no part in it, then Christ is of no more use to us than any other saint because his death is merely that of a human being. Christ's achievement would then become a pure model for the faithful, turning Christ

nicht solt heissen, Gott ist fur uns gestorben, sondern allein ein mensch, so sind wir verloren, Aber wenn Gottes tod und Gott gestorben in der wogeschuessel ligt, so sincket er unter und wir faren empor, als eine leichte ledige schuessel, Aber er kan wol auch wider emporfaren oder aus seiner schuessel springen. Er kuendte aber nicht in die schuessel sitzen, Er mueste uns gleich ein mensch werden, das es heissen kuendte, Gott gestorben, Gottes marter, Gottes blut, Gottes tod, Denn Gott in seiner natur kan nicht sterben, Aber nu Gott und Mensch vereinigt ist in einer Person, so heisst recht Gottes tod, wenn der mensch stirbt, der mit Gott ein ding oder eine Person ist."

³⁰ If a dei-passibilist interpretation of this text is correct, then it is understandable why the 'historicization of God explanation' has been such an attractive way of filling in this transitional gap. If God can 'become', then suffering is just one aspect of His triune history. He can bend His own being to our level, in a manner of speaking, and conduct us onwards to His own eschatological future.

simply into an exemplar. In order to redeem human beings from the power of death, God has to co-suffer and co-die in Christ. That is why Luther makes use of the image of the scale, to illustrate that God can go down, can rise and jump out of his pan. God lets himself be overtaken by death in the suffering and dying of Jesus, and yet he remains the victor over death. The divine nature was present throughout the earthly life of Jesus, and was not untouched by the whole affair of the incarnation. With this it becomes clear how closely the two-nature Christology and soteriology are linked in Luther's thinking. It is a theological axiom that Christ be affected by suffering even according to his divine nature, otherwise salvation through Christ's suffering is inconceivable to him."³¹

Ngien's analysis is multi-faceted, and touches upon a number of elements already introduced in the previous sub-section as ingredient to the divergence interpretation of Luther's soteriology.³² These various elements all rely, however, upon the seminal assumption that the 1539 text clearly endorses the suffering of Christ's divine nature. Is such an assumption warranted?

A major reason why Ngien identifies an endorsement of divine passibility within Luther's discussion here is the fact that he presupposes what the previous chapter has determined to be an illegitimate 'semantic equation'. He tacitly assumes, in other words, that 'God suffers' is equivalent, for Luther, with 'divinity suffers'. Because Luther ascribes death and suffering *to God*, Ngien thinks it fair to conclude that the final target of such predicate ascription is Christ's divine *nature*. Chapter three has already shown, however, that 'God' is not always equivalent to 'divine nature' in Luther's christological semantics. If the equation *were* valid, moreover, then not just Luther, but nearly every orthodox theologian from Chalcedon onwards could justifiably be suspected to reject the

³¹Dennis Ngien, "Chalcedonian Christology and Beyond," 59.

³²Perhaps most important in this regard is the transparent coordination in Ngien's explanation between Luther's two-nature Christology and soteriology; a coordination that we have referred to in terms of a 'passibilist symmetry.'

doctrine of divine impassibility!³³ Luther, after all, is by no means the only theologian to apply human predicates generically to *God*, nor the first to insist upon doing so for soteriological grounds.³⁴ The mere appearance of such predication applications in the 1539 text is hardly adequate evidence for the revolutionary shift Ngien seeks to attach to Luther's metaphorical explanation.

Ngien's passibilist interpretation also proceeds at the direct expense of immediate and peripheral qualificatory discourse in the text itself. Luther clarifies in the very paragraph Ngien references that God *cannot die* in His nature.³⁵ What can be the purpose of this qualification, if not to indicate Luther's abiding assumption that a crucial differentiation of meaning separates predications directed to 'God', and those directed to the 'divine nature'?³⁶ Ngien, of course, insists that the differentiation is wholly diachronic in nature. He argues that it reflects a sequential ontological shift, which qualifies God's being as the result of the incarnation.³⁷ By interpreting Luther's qualificatory discourse in this way, Ngien apparently sidesteps the conclusion that Luther retains the traditional practice of distinguishing between what applies to the *person* of Christ and what applies to each of His *natures*. Because of this eschewal, he is also able to avoid the implication that Luther preserves the doctrine of divine impassibility through this distinction's use.

³³For documentation of this point, see the previous chapter. Ngien is clearly aware that not all who affirm the phrase 'God suffers' endorse divine passibility. He concedes as much in the opening pages of his argument, where he notes traditional interpretations of the *communicatio idiomatum*. What I am arguing in this section, however, is that, although Ngien is aware of the distinctions I am highlighting, he fails to see that Luther makes use of them in the very texts he suggests to overcome the traditional view.

³⁴Of course, such predication always presumes the reality of the incarnation in traditional discourse, and also for Luther.

³⁵Emphasis mine. WA 50, 590. "Denn Gott in seiner natur kan nicht sterben".

³⁶In other words, if *Luther* evidently thinks this distinction is important, why are we warranted to interpret his language as if it is not?

³⁷For more on how Ngien interprets Luther in diachronic fashion, see chapter 3.

The previous chapter, however, has already established compelling reasons why a diachronic interpretation of Luther's qualificatory discourse is simply implausible. Like the sermons on John and the disputation of 1540, careful consultation of the broader context in Luther's treatise "On the Councils and the Church" unambiguously overturns a divergence interpretation of the data.

As he writes the (in)famous 'God on the scale' passage, Luther is in the midst of a historical description and theological critique of the 5th century bishop Nestorius, whose publically expressed christological opinions were among the major impetuses responsible for the convention of the council of Ephesus in 433, and Chalcedon in 451.³⁸ Nestorius is known, above all, for his refusal to ascribe human predicates to God, even when those predicates serve a clear christological function. He declines, for instance to refer to Christ's mother Mary as the 'bearer of God', or Θεοτόκος'. By insisting upon the ascription of death and suffering *to God*, Luther means to cut at the heart of Nestorius' error, and levy against it, as a kind of orthodox counter-balance, the claim that human predicates *must* apply to God, because Christ is both human and divine. But how and why does Luther believe Nestorius to err by denying this semantic practice? Why exactly does he interpret Nestorius' reticence to affirm 'humanity-originating' God-ascriptions as wrong-headed?³⁹

³⁸Luther, however, deals with Nestorius primarily in relation to the council of Ephesus; a reflection, no doubt of the insufficient historical resources with which he was working. This portion of Luther's description reflected in this section's discussion is available in WA 50, 583-92. An English translation may be found in LW 41, 95-106.

³⁹The reader will note that we are asking how *Luther* interprets Nestorius, and not seeking, on the basis of recent scholarship, to identify what the real Nestorius actually thought. Along with other theologians writing in the late medieval period, Luther's knowledge of the 5th century conciliar debates was limited, and, by modern standards, therefore deficient in a number of respects. For a treatment of Nestorius and the debates he ignited, see John Anthony McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: The Christological Controversy*.

Ngien assumes that Luther's dissatisfaction has to do with Nestorius' commitment to the doctrine of divine impassibility.⁴⁰ Nestorius errs because he imports a philosophically determined concept of God, and artificially restricts christological discourse on its basis. He wrongly assumes that 'divinity' is incapable of suffering or death. Ngien's interpretation does not accurately represent Luther's criticism of Nestorius, however, at least as this criticism is expressed in the 1539 treatise. Luther nowhere chastises Nestorius because he assumes that *divinity* is incapable of suffering. He criticizes the 5th century bishop, rather, because he supposes that the ascription of human predicates *to God* entails a coextensive application of the same predicates to Christ's divinity.

Unlike most appraisals of the Nestorian heresy, Luther does not imagine that Nestorius actually *taught* a bifurcation of subjects in his doctrine of Christ. He grants that Nestorius surely intended to proscribe the disintegration of Christ's personal unity. Luther's accusation is that Nestorius practically (better, *semantically*) betrays this unity by denying that there is a single object of ascriptive reference.⁴¹ What Nestorius does not

⁴⁰Dennis Ngien, *The Suffering of God according to Martin Luther*, 75. Ngien cites the interpretation of Reiner Jansen as corroboration of this view.

⁴¹LW 41, 100-101. "Thus Nestorius' error was not that he believed Christ to be a pure man, or that he made two persons of him; on the contrary, he confesses two natures, the divine and the human, in one person—but he will not admit a *communicatio idiomatum*. I cannot express that in one word in German. *Idioma* means that which is inherent in a nature or is its attribute, such as dying, suffering, weeping, speaking, laughing, eating, drinking, sleeping, sorrowing, rejoicing, being born, having a mother, suckling the breast, walking, standing, working, sitting, lying down, and other things of that kind, which are called *idiomata naturae humanae*, that is, qualities that belong to man by nature, which he can and must do or even suffer; for *idioma* in Greek, *proprium* in Latin, is a thing—let us, for the time being, call it an attribute. Again, an *idioma deitatis*, "an attribute of divine nature," is that it is immortal, omnipotent, infinite, not born, does not eat, drink, sleep, stand, walk, sorrow, weep—and what more can one say? To be God is an immeasurably different thing than to be man; that is why the *idiomata* of the two natures cannot coincide. That is the opinion of Nestorius." WA 50, 587. "So ist nu Nestorij jrthum nicht der, das er Christum fur einen puren Menschen helt, auch nicht zwo personen draus macht, Sondern zwo natur, Gott und mensch, in einer person bekennet, Aber Communicationem idiomatum wil er nicht zugeben, das kan ich mit einem wort nicht deudsch reden, Idioma heisst, was einer natur anhangt oder jr eigenschafft ist, Als sterben, leiden, weinen, reden, lachen, essen, trincken, schlaffen, trauren, freuen, geborn werden, mutter

realize is that the hypostatic union and the *communicatio idiomatum* stand or fall together. It is logically incoherent to try to preserve one while excluding the other. Nestorius' heresy, in other words, is the inadvertent product of his logical incompetence, not an intentional perversion of doctrine through malice.⁴²

The attentive reader will note a striking similarity between Luther's criticism of Nestorius, and the argument he levies against Caspar Schwenckfeld in the disputation of 1540, surveyed in the previous chapter.⁴³ In both cases, the problem is *not* that Christ's divinity is presumed to be incapable of ontological defect. Nestorius and Schwenckfeld err only when, on account of this presupposition, they deny the application of human predicates to the person of Christ, *who is God*. Luther's quarrel is not with what Nestorius' semantic proscription aspires to avoid (the suffering of divinity), but with what it inadvertently fails fully to affirm (the hypostatic union). Nestorius is caught on the horns of an illusory dilemma. He assumes that he must choose either 1) to protect the integrity of deity; or 2) to affirm the application of human predicates to God in Christ.

haben, brueste saugen, gehen, stehen, erbeiten, sitzen, ligen, und was des mehr ist, heissen idiomata naturae humanae, das ist eigenschafft, die einem menschen von natur anhangen, als die er thun oder leiden kan auch wol mus, Denn Jdioma griechisch, proprium latine, ist ein ding, Lasts uns dieweil ein eigenschafft heissen. Widerumb, Jdioma Deitatis, Goettlicher natur eigenschafft ist, das sie unsterblich, allmechtig, unendlich, nicht geborn, nicht isset, trinckt, schlefft, stehet, gehet, trauret, weinet und was sol man viel sagen? Es ist gar ein unmeslich ander ding, Gott, weder ein mensch ist, darumb koennen die idiomata beider natur nicht ubereinkomen, Dis ist die meinung Nestorij."

⁴²LW 41, 102-3. "This crude, unlearned man did not see that he was asserting the impossible when simultaneously he seriously took Christ to be God and man in one person and yet declined to ascribe the *idiomata* of the natures to the same person of Christ. He wants to hold to the truth of the first, but what follows from the first should not be true—he thereby indicates that he himself does not understand what he is denying." WA 50, 589. "Denn der große ungelerte Man sahe das nicht, das er unmueglich ding furgab, das er zugleich Christum ernstlich fur Gott und mensch in einer Person hielt, und doch die Jdiomata der natur nicht wolt derselben Person Christi zugeben, Das erst wil er fur war halten, und das sol nicht war sein, das doch aus dem ersten folget, damit er anzeigt, das er selbs nicht verstehet, was er verneinet."

⁴³Luther explicitly lumps Nestorius and Schwenckfeld together in his 1544 commentary on Isaiah 53. See WA 40/3, 703. There are also deep resonances with Luther's oft-expressed criticism of Ulrich Zwingli. Luther draws this connection within the 1539 treatise. WA 50, 591.

The choice is a false one. The dilemma only exists because Nestorius fails to distinguish between ascriptions that refer to the *Person* of Christ, and those that refer to the *natures* of Christ.⁴⁴

The besetting christological problem, which afflicts both Nestorius and Caspar Schwenckfeld, is an inability to discern when a particular predication requires another as its correlate, and when not. Nestorius imagines that the application of creaturely predicates to God logically demands that Christ's divinity is ontologically conditioned. On the other hand, he evidently does *not* think it follows from the incarnation that all predicates must be ascribed to the single agent who is both God and man.⁴⁵ Nestorius is wrong on both counts. This is why Luther credits his error *not* to an inadequate doctrine of God, but to a lack of logical sophistication. The inadvertent byproduct of the confusion, however, is an *implicitly* heretical doctrine of Christ. Nestorius is *right* to insist upon the impassibility of Christ's divinity, but *wrong* to conclude, by virtue of this insistence, that one may not ascribe Christ's *human* predicates to 'God.'⁴⁶ His denial

⁴⁴ This is the very distinction Luther's qualificatory discourse seeks to express.

⁴⁵ Luther articulates this basic criticism throughout his treatment of Nestorius. Perhaps the most forthright example appears in the following. LW 41, 101-2. "Thus his folly is exactly that against which one teaches in the schools, "One who admits the premise of a good conclusion cannot deny the conclusion." In German we would say, "If the one is true, the other must also be true; if the second is not true, then the first is not true either." Whoever admits that Greta is your wife cannot deny that her child (if she is pious) is your child. If one teaches these things in the schools, no one thinks that there could be such crude people; but ask the regents and jurists whether they are not often confronted by such parties, who admit something and still do not want to grant what follows from it." WA 50, 588 "Und ist seine narrheit eben die, dawider man leret in den schulen: Qui concedit antecedens bonae consequentiae, non potest negare consequens, Auff Deudsch reden wir also: Ist eines war, so mus das ander auch war sein, ist das ander nicht war, so ist das erst auch nicht war. Wer das zugibt, das Greta dein ehefrau sey, der kan nicht leugnen, das jr kind (wo sie from ist) dein kind sey. Wenn man solchs in der Schulen leret, so denckt niemand, das solche grobe Leute sein koennen, Aber frage die Regenten und Juristen drumb, ob sie nicht haben offft solche Part fur sich gehabt, die ein ding bekennen und doch nicht zulassen wollen, was daraus folget."

⁴⁶ Luther actually affirms that Nestorius is right to deny that human predicates apply to divinity as such. He grants as much by insisting that referring to Mary as the mother of God does not mean that Christ's *divinity* is truly derived from Mary's womb. In the same way, Nestorius' *intent* is simply to say

splits Christ into more than one ‘agent’, since human and divine properties never coincide for him upon a single acting subject. This bifurcation is the ineluctable consequence of Nestorius’ ill-informed christological semantics.

It is because Ngien misconstrues the nature of Luther’s criticism of Nestorius that he is able to affirm a passibilist interpretation of the excerpt copied above from the 1539 treatise, even when the text itself contains clear specificatory discourse that proscribes such a view. Once situated within this broader context, however, this interpretation is shown to be implausible, just as we found to be the case in a divergence interpretation of Luther’s sermons on John from the late 1530’s. Like Luther’s criticism of Caspar Schwenckfeld in the disputation of 1540, the 1539 text does not reject, but actually *affirms* Nestorius’ seminal reticence to apply human predicates directly to Christ’s divinity. Ngien’s interpretation misses this because it assumes the very semantic equation whose illegitimacy forms the basis of Luther’s counter-argument; namely, that ‘*God suffers*’ is basically the same as ‘*divinity suffers*’.⁴⁷

that Christ, in His divinity, is immortal, and in *this*, Luther agrees with him. WA 50, 589. The problem is what Nestorius denies more than he needs to in order to preserve this belief. Once again, Luther ultimately credits his incompetence for his inadvertent heresy.

⁴⁷Further reason to reject Ngien’s reading is furnished by the fact that Luther elsewhere enlists this same image of God on the scale, and clearly reminds his reader in the immediate context that the divinity of Christ is not crucified. Ironically, this parallel text comes from the very series of sermons on John that Ngien previously argues to establish Luther’s embrace of a two-way understanding of the communication of attributes. “Daruber haben die alden veter sehr gekempfft und es widder die ketzer erhalten, das in Christo zweierley naturen sind, aber nicht zwo person, sondern nur ein Sohn. Also redet die Schriefft, und wir sollen auch also reden. Nach der Menschheit, do ist wohl gecreutziget, und nach der Gottheit allein Himel und Erden geschaffen, aber dieweil diese Person Got und mensch ist, so wird recht gesaget: Gottes Sohn ist Schopffer himmels und der erden und wirdt auch gecreutziget. Man mus die Person nicht zutrennen, als, das alleine die Menschheit da bliebe, sondern sie auch Gott gewesen ist, wie den S. Hilarius saget: Christus passus est requiescente verbo. Und wen wir auch das nicht erhalten, das diese person sej Gott und mensch, so am creutz gestorben ist, so musten wir ewiglich verdampt und verlorn sein, den wir müssen einen Heiland haben, der mehr sej, dan ein Heilige oder Engel, den wen ehr nicht mehr, grosser und besser were, so wurde uns nicht geholfen. So ehr aber Gott ist, so ist der Schatz so schwer, das ehr nicht allein wegkwieget und auffhebt die Sunde und den tod, sondern auch gibt das ewige leben. Das kondte sonst kein Mensch geben noch thun, oder den Teuffel und tod uberwinden.” WA 47, 87. This paragraph is excerpted from a sermon on John 3, which Luther preached in 1538.

Ngien's construal of the 1539 text relies upon semantic analyses, which previous chapters have already shown to be inadequate. This tangibly illustrates the profound extent to which the divergence interpretation of Luther's soteriology has its roots in a divergence interpretation of the reformer's Christology. The inter-dependency of tiers one and two manifests itself in a shared exegetical pattern.⁴⁸ The source of the pattern is a perceived, intra-systematic requirement. A divergence interpretation of Luther's soteriology *demands* as its conceptual pre-requisite the existence of a *reciprocal*, ontologically-conditioning, communicative relation between the divinity and humanity of Christ. Unless Luther's doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* fulfills this structural condition, the divergence rendering of his doctrine of salvation forfeits its coherency.⁴⁹

In order to retain the descriptive plausibility of its proposal, a divergence account of Luther's soteriology must assume something like the interpretation of Luther's Christology criticized in the previous two chapters to be valid. To the extent that this is so, however, the argument contained in chapters two and three kills two birds with one stone. If a divergence exegesis of Luther's Christology is illegitimate, then so is a divergence interpretation of his soteriology. This is because these two interpretations are, in the end, one and the same. All that is really required to delegitimize the second 'tier' of the divergence thesis, in the final analysis, is simply to reiterate all that has already been established in the refutation of the first. By doing so, one effectively crumbles the foundation on which the divergence interpretation of Luther's soteriology stands.

⁴⁸Ngien, in other words, is simply one especially clear example of how the second 'tier' of the divergence thesis continues and relies upon strands of interpretation forged first in relation to Luther's Christology.

⁴⁹How could one persist in the argument that Christ *does* suffer according to His divinity for Luther, once it is conceded that Luther's treatment of two-nature Christology prohibits such suffering in the first place?

The Deathless Might of Christ: Unfolding a Non-Divergence Alternative

The divergence thesis does not merely claim *that* Luther endorses divine passibility. It also furnishes an explanation of *why* this endorsement is necessary to Luther's theology, and *how* it comports especially with the governing commitments of his doctrine of redemption. It tries to convey why Luther's insistence upon the suffering of God is an essential part of his thought. A divergence explanation of these matters proceeds outwards from the underlying presupposition that Christ's divinity and humanity are mutually conditioned through their hypostatic union with one another. It seeks, on the basis of this presupposition, to demonstrate how the various components of Luther's soterio-logic fall into alignment with this fundamental reality. So far, this chapter has factually delegitimized the divergence view by exposing the weaknesses of its textual evidence. It remains necessary, however, to provide an alternative synthetic construal of the question the divergence interpretation seeks to answer: In what way is God engaged in the sufferings of Christ? The following discussion must demonstrate that an impassibilist account makes better 'textual' *and* 'systematic' sense of Luther's soteriological commitments.⁵⁰

Luther clearly presupposes that *something* is uniquely true of Christ, on account of His being divine, that allows Him to enter into death and yet live; to fall under

⁵⁰This is to concede that the implicit questions posed by the divergence thesis concerning Luther's doctrine of redemption are legitimate ones, even if its answers are finally insufficient. Why is it, for instance, that Luther is so adamant that the *suffering* Christ be divine? In what way does Luther perceive the 'divinity' of the suffering Christ to be soteriologically necessary? While the 1539 text's famous metaphor of 'God on the scale' may not commend the suffering of Christ's *divinity*, it certainly expresses an ardent insistence, on Luther's part, upon the radical immanence of God in Christ. What kind of immanence does Luther have in mind, and what is its particular soteriological function within the economy of redemption? The present section will attend to these systematic questions, and seek to demonstrate how Luther's christological commitment to divine impassibility forms an integral part of his soteriological vision as well.

condemnation, and yet attain vindication; to suffer, and yet not be destroyed. In a sermon preached on John chapter one in 1537 Luther comments:

“If Christ is not true and natural God, born of the Father in eternity and Creator of all creatures, we are doomed. For what would Christ’s suffering and death avail me if Christ were merely a human being like you and me? As such He could not have overcome devil, death, and sin; He would have proved far too weak for them and could never have helped us.”⁵¹

In Christ, God is indeed radically involved. He enters into the condition of sinful humanity. He does not do so, however, in such a way that renders Him the helpless victim of powers beyond His control. This introduces a tension, which the present section must address. Luther portrays the incarnate Christ as vulnerable in one sense *and* invulnerable in another. What accounts for the apparent incongruity? Luther nicely encapsulates the tension here in view in a sermon preached in 1538: “The incarnate God, who was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered the old serpent’s sting and bite, but without being devoured and destroyed.”⁵² Framed in the terminology of this text, two questions must be posed: 1) *How* is Christ ‘stung’? and 2) *Why* is He not thereby destroyed? In other words, how does Luther understand Christ to be genuinely vulnerable, and yet really *invulnerable* at one and the same time?

⁵¹ LW 22, 21. WA 46, 554. “...denn bleibet Christus nicht warer, natuerlicher GOTT, von Vater in ewigkeit geboren, und Schoepffer aller Creaturn, so sind wir verloren. Denn was were mir mit der HERRN Christi leiden und sterben geholffen, wenn er ein Mensch nur were wie ich und du? so hette er den Teufel, Tod und die Suende nicht uberwinden koennen, er were jnen viel zu schwach gewesen, hette uns auch nicht helfen koennen.”

⁵² LW 22, 469. WA 47, 180. “Sondern der Gott, der do ist mensch worden, geborn von Maria der Jungfrauen, der leidet den stich und biss der altten schlangen. Aber ehr wirdt drumb nicht gahr auffgefressen und verschlungen.” Luther’s main point in this section is to illustrate the impotence of all assaults against Christ, of which the rejection of Christ’s teaching as heresy is foremost. Luther likens this impotence, however, to the fact that Christ truly dies (thus appearing to be vanquished) and yet rises again in victory.

This tension possesses a christological point of derivation. It exists essentially because Luther believes that two sets of radically different properties are true of the incarnate Christ at one and the same time. Luther accentuates this parity of attributes with evident relish throughout his lifetime, often as a means of highlighting the great and incomprehensible mystery of the incarnation. One early example appears in a reflection upon Psalm 69, written in 1513. In this text, Luther marvels of Christ that “He is at the same time cursed and blessed, at the same time alive and dead, at the same time grieving and rejoicing.”⁵³ Contrastive litanies like this one are common in Luther’s writings.⁵⁴ They accentuate the tension already identified as resident to Luther’s presentation of the ‘solidarity motif’ in other texts. The sheer simultaneity of Luther’s two-fold designation of Christ forecloses any potential resolution of the tension through diachronic sequence. The various contrastive predicates cannot be distributed into chronologically differentiated compartments along the parabola of Luther’s redemptive narrative. The incarnate Christ is not *first* blessed, and *then* cursed; *first* alive, and *then* dead; *first* invulnerable, and *then* vulnerable. No, there is a synchronic concurrence of contrastive attributes, which continues throughout the life of Christ, and reaches the apex of its intensity precisely at the nadir of the parabola’s downward swing; the radical solidarity of God with sinners enacted in the crucifixion of Jesus. If the divergence account were true,

⁵³ LW 10, 364-5. WA 3, 426. “Non intellexerunt etiam, quod maledictio ista non potuit totam personam absorbere, sed fuit absorpta, quia deus erat nulli potens maledictione subiacere, sed tantummodo caro eius. Et ideo simul maledictus et benedictus, simul vivus et mortuus, simul dolens et gaudens, ut omnia in se absorberet mala et omnia ex se conferret bona. Benedictus dominus noster Amen.” The reader will note, in this broader context, that Luther explains the un-conquerability of Christ in light of His divinity which renders His person incapable of being swallowed up and destroyed. Subsequent discussion will highlight the implications of this point for ‘aligning’ Luther’s soteriology and Christology.

⁵⁴ A later manifestation of this sharp contrast is to be found in Luther’s 1544 commentary on Isaiah 53. See WA 40/3, 700-706. In this section, Luther is addressing the criticism that Christ cannot be the Messiah, or God, because He is described as deformed and unsightly. Luther’s fundamental response is that Christ is both true man, and true God at one and the same time.

we would expect to find evidence for such a diachronic resolution. At the nadir of Christ's passion, on the cross, one would expect to find *only* grief, death, suffering, and condemnation—since Christ is understood, by this view to be vulnerable at that moment according to *both* natures. The fact that Christ remains *alive* even while dead introduces an element that the divergence thesis cannot easily reconcile.

Soteriologically, the resultant unification of contrastive properties in the person and work of Christ introduces what can provisionally be described as a massive strife of contraries.⁵⁵ The low point of God's descent into the condition of sinful humanity emerges as the site of a great redemptive battle; an epic struggle between life and death; sin and righteousness; corruptibility and incorruptibility; God's power and the devil's sting. This is why the redemptive image of a 'duel' or 'conflict' so often accompanies expressions of Luther's exchange soteriology.⁵⁶ It finds lapidary expression, once again, in the 1520 treatise "On the Freedom of a Christian", although this text is by no means exceptional in its presentation of the 'battle motif'.

"Here we have a most pleasing vision not only of communion but of a blessed struggle and victory and salvation and redemption. Christ is God and man in one person. He has neither sinned nor died, and is not condemned, and he cannot sin, die, or be condemned; his righteousness, life, and salvation are unconquerable, eternal, omnipotent.

⁵⁵It is essential to note, on this point, that conflict need not entail an abiding, unresolved 'stasis' or 'fissure', as Theobald Beer's interpretation assumes it does. These contraries are truly united in Christ on account of the hypostatic union, which Beer wrongly assumes Luther inadvertently to eschew. There is, moreover, a soteriological resolution of these contraries in which the sinner becomes genuinely righteous, the mortal becomes immortal, and so on.

⁵⁶The centrality of the so-called *Kampfmotiv* in Luther's soteriology of exchange has been well documented especially by Uwe Riese-Braun in his book *Duellum mirabile: Studien zum Kampfmotiv in Martin Luthers Theologie*, Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte, Bd. 73 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999). Space precludes establishing here what Riese-Braun's work amply demonstrates; namely, that the 'battle motif' pervades Luther's theology from its earliest stages of development until the works published during the year of his death. This pervasive quality is a major assumption of this chapter, albeit one for whose legitimacy we must rely upon the labors of other secondary studies. One late manifestation of the 'battle motif' is to be found in Luther's 1544 commentary on Isaiah 53, where Christ is likened to the 'strong man' who defeats all the enemies fighting against humanity by overpowering them. See WA 40/3, 733; 741-2.

By the wedding ring of faith he shares in the sins, death, and pains of hell which are his bride's. As a matter of fact, he makes them his own and acts as if they were his own and as if he himself had sinned; he suffered, died, and descended into hell that he might overcome them all. Now since it was such a one who did all this, and death and hell could not swallow him up, these were necessarily swallowed up by him in a mighty duel; for his righteousness is greater than the sins of all men, his life stronger than death, his salvation more invincible than hell."⁵⁷

A more poetic depiction of epic 'battle' appears in the fourth stanza of Luther's 1524

Easter hymn, "Christ Lay in the Bonds of Death".

"That was a right wondrous strife
When Death in Life's grip wallowed:
Off victorious came Life,
Death he has quite upswallowed.
The Scripture has published that—
How one Death the other ate.
Thus Death is become a laughter. Alleluia!"⁵⁸

These descriptions, it must parenthetically be observed, exhibit positively no interest in the permanent reification of antithesis for its own sake. The 'strife of contraries' that attends Christ's radical solidarity with sinners possesses rather a very clear, redemptive terminus. The life of Christ is *stronger* than His death, and thus *overcomes* it. The contrast gives way, so far as the enduring distinction between God and humanity permits, to a redemptive resolution.⁵⁹ The epic battle yields a supreme victor.

⁵⁷ LW 31, 351-2. WA 7, 55. "Hic iam dulcissimum spectaculum prodit non solum communionis sed salutaris belli et victoriae et salutis et redemptionis. Cum enim Christus sit deus et homo eaque persona, quae nec peccavit nec moritur nec damnatur, sed nec peccare, mori, damnari potest, Eiusque iustitia, vita, salus insuperabilis, aeterna, omnipotens est, Cum, inquam, talis persona peccata, mortem, infernum sponsae et propter annulum fidei sibi communia, immo propria facit et in iis non aliter se habet quam si sua essent ipseque peccasset, laborans, moriens et ad infernum descendens, ut omnia superaret, peccatumque, mors et infernus eum absorbere non possent, necessario in ipso absorpta sunt stupendo duello. Nam iustitia sua omnium peccatis superior, vita sua omni morte potentior, salus sua omni inferno invictior."

⁵⁸ LW 53, 257. WA 35, 444. "Es war eyn wunderlich krieg, da todt und leben rungen, Das leben behielt den sieg, es hat den tod verschlungen. Die schrift hat verkundet das, wie eyn tod den andern fras, Eyn spott aus dem tod ist worden."

⁵⁹ That is, the humanity of Christ becomes immortal, but does not become identical with the divine nature. There remains a distinction between the natures of Christ, just as there remains a distinction

The so-called *Kampfmotiv* furnishes a crucial lens through which Luther coordinates the drama of redemption with two nature Christology.⁶⁰ By attending to texts, which explicate this coordination, it becomes possible to distill the underlying, christological sub-structure of Luther's exchange soteriology. An examination of this sub-structure will specify the relation Luther envisions between the divinity of Christ and the abject lowliness of Jesus' passion. It will also further elaborate the precise character of Luther's christo-soteriological symmetry, which the first section of this chapter has only begun to sketch.

Not all of the contrastive soteriological predicates, which apply to Christ may be aligned neatly with one particular nature, to the complete ascriptive exclusion of its counterpart. Luther does not think, for instance, that Christ is 'righteous' only on account of His divinity, and thus reckoned a sinner because of an intrinsic defect of the humanity He assumes.⁶¹ There is a degree of internal variety within Luther's christo-soteriological alignment, which the present investigation must exercise care not to trample with

between Christ and the redeemed Christian; even though they now exist in the highest possible union with one another.

⁶⁰This does not suggest, in any way, that 'soteriological functions' *are* natures for Luther, as Theobald Beer claims. The point is simply that Luther believes each of Christ's natures to be engaged in the redeeming work of God in its own respective way. This is an assumption, it hardly bears mentioning, that he shares with a great host of patristic and medieval theologians before him. Beer's attempt to derive from this assumption the notion that natures are entirely *reducible* to combative functions for Luther, is one that the present author finds rather strange indeed. It simply does not follow that because Christ's natures *have* soteriological functions, that they simply *are* soteriological functions. For Beer's claim that Luther 'functionalizes' nature language, see, for example, Theobald Beer, *Der fröhliche Wechsel und Streit*, 382.

⁶¹Luther believes that Christ is perfect in obedience to the law according to both natures. He is like us in our humanity in all things *except* for sin. Luther affirms the innocence of Christ's humanity, for instance, in his 1544 commentary on Isaiah 53. See WA 40/3, 696. How it is for Luther that Christ is nevertheless truly condemned as a transgressor by God, the law, the devil and human beings, is a question that cannot detain us here. The reason this condemnation does not 'stick', in a manner of speaking, is the infinite righteousness of Christ, which is never displaced even as Christ is condemned as a sinner. This theme lies much closer to the center of Luther's soteriological emphasis than does the matter of divine suffering. Yet, the lesser degree of centrality does not mean that Luther fails express a clear opinion on the latter, nor that it is not an essential aspect of his doctrine of redemption.

unguarded generalizations. Its focus is restricted to the examination of christological predicates, which express the simultaneous vulnerability and invulnerability of Christ. Included within this more restrictive concentration is the tension created between Christ's genuine *death* and His purportedly unconquerable *life*; the mystery of His *suffering* in contrast with His *in corruptibility*. Concerning these matters, Luther postulates a rather clear and straightforward christo-soteriological alignment.

The alignment to which I refer is rendered explicit, for instance, in a 1537 sermon of Luther's on Luke chapter 1, where he states: "Therefore, [Christ] dies as a human, and lives as God. Death is swallowed up in life, and the immortality of God devours the mortality of human beings."⁶² Christ's vulnerability is identified in this text rather directly with His mortal humanity, and Christ's invulnerability with His immortal deity. This identification yields, as its conceptual correlate, a particular determination of the christo-soteriological mechanics responsible for the redemptive transition of Christ from death to life. The Person of Christ *cannot* die, nor His human flesh molder in the grave, because the divine nature with which this flesh is personally united is invincible.⁶³ The

⁶²WA 45, 436. "Moritur igitur ut homo, Et vivit ut Deus, Et mors absorbetur in vita, et immortalitas Dei devorat mortalitatem hominis." In the broader context of this text, Luther is fashioning an apologetic for the legitimacy of two-nature Christology. On the basis of the passage from Luke 1, Luther isolates aspects of Christ's identity that point either to His divinity or humanity. For instance, because Christ is declared to be the Son of David, He must be genuinely human and thus mortal as other humans are. On the other hand, because the messianic kingdom promised to Him is without end, Christ must also be immortal and therefore fully divine. Luther's reflection upon the death of Christ seeks to filter this broader insight concerning the intrinsic duality of Christ's existence, and apply it to the death of Christ.

⁶³The following excerpt from a 1533 sermon of Luther's furnishes a similar instance of this logic at work. The Devil kills Christ's humanity, but the Person lives on account of the divine nature. Because the *Person* of Christ lives, however, His humanity cannot really die either, and thus Christ attains victory. WA 37, 28-9. "Die humanitatem hellt er ihm fur, lest ihn drauff stechen, wueten &c.. ubi hoc effectit et occidit, occidit quidem humanitatem, sed persona vivit, quae est **Got** et homo **zu samen**, ut symbolum, cum igitur persona non mortalis, ergo nec humanitas. Er hieb nur der person ein wunden i. e. Er schlug auff die menscheit, die G|ottheit kund er nicht treffen, schrecken, gesetz &c.. et angriffen person, quam non &c.. Ibi cogitur mors niddel|iegen und T|eufel unter fus, quia hat all sein gifft und zorn &c.. et tamen non die recht person troffen. Hactenus die r|echten getroffen. Sed quia non ius zu ihm, ideo zerreist im Christus ventrem, os &c.. Non solum, quod non deb|uit mori, sed quod non potuit. Es hat mors, infernus &c.. an der

lynchpin of this explanation is an unambiguous affirmation of the *invulnerability* of Christ's divinity. Without this affirmation, the logic of Luther's soteriological description cannot get off the ground.

Luther reinforces the same 'christological alignment' in a wide range of colorful metaphors enlisted to explain *how* Christ is victorious over corruption, death, and the devil. In an Easter sermon of 1526, Luther likens the person of Christ to the burning bush depicted in Exodus 3. Just as fire is unable to burn or consume the branches of the bush, Christ's humanity likewise cannot be destroyed in death, but is raised up immortal. This is so, because Christ's divinity inhabits its assumed humanity in bodily form, and renders it impossible for death to overcome it. Under ordinary circumstances, Luther notes, fire *ought* to be stronger than a bush's combustible branches. In the same way, Christ the human being *should* be devoured by the sheer depth of His sufferings and death, and thus utterly annihilated by them. Nevertheless, on account of the deathless might of divinity united with Christ's frail humanity, the incarnate Son is "*morte fortior*".⁶⁴ In the midst of death, He yet *lives*. The essential invulnerability of Christ's divine nature is, for Luther, an intrinsic presupposition of resurrection.

person verlorn, quia accusa|verunt ut pec|catorem, ut ubeltheter &c.. ut purum hominem, ist nicht war. Ideo quare, peccatum, mors, diabole schendlicher, accusas me? Ibi nihil possunt dicere. Ideo iam dicimus non solum, quod verus deus, sed unschuldig secundum humanitatem. Ideo facienda persona magna. Si hoc, tum etiam historia resurrectionis auch gros. Est deus et verus deus in humanitate, verus dei filius et virginis, Maior caelo et terra. 2. unschuldig. Non peccatum fecit. Ideo maius hoc quam omnes diaboli, peccata &c.. wigt tausent mal mher. Si Christianus hanc magnitudinem personae fasset, agnoscit fructus magnitudinem, quam gering diabolus gegen ihm. Si maior caelo et terra, peccato, morte &c.. Ideo quicquid facit, patitur &c.. mus seer gros sein."

⁶⁴ WA 20, 354-5 "Rubus est Christus, in quo habitat deus et est viridis, quia est innocens homo absque omni culpa. Sicut rubus crevit in deserto absque ulla hominis opera, sic ipse natus absque virili &c.. Deus est in rubo, ideo non potest comburi i. e. rubus i. e. humanitas Christi steckt mitten im leiden, stirbt et tamen non moritur, certe mirum. Sic hic Christus non solum purus homo, alias Satan eum het hin gefurt, aber da die deitas corporaliter in eo homine habitabat, erat ergo impossibile, ut comburatur, sed in media morte oportet ista persona vivat. *Es sol ja das feuer sterckher quam busch, sed contrarium. Sic mors debebat Christum vorare, sed Christus morte fortior est &c..*" Emphasis mine.

There is perhaps no metaphor more frequently enlisted by Luther to express this theme than mythological image of the ‘baited Leviathan’.⁶⁵ In this image, Luther likens death and the devil to a great and ferocious beast. Like a fish lured in by the angler’s worm, the devil is deceived by the ostensible weakness of Christ’s humanity, and thus tricked into devouring Him. He does not recognize, however, that Christ is also fully divine, and thus incapable of destruction. The divine nature of Christ is to death and the devil very much like a clandestine fishing hook concealed beneath its ‘bait’ (in this case, the frail vulnerability of the humanity). Once ‘swallowed’ (a metaphorical concept that closely approximates what we have so far referred to as the ‘solidarity motif’ in Luther’s exchange soteriology), Christ therefore shreds death, the devil, and Hell from the inside out.⁶⁶ An emblematic occurrence of this motif appears in a sermon on John 3:16, delivered by Luther on the third week after Trinity Sunday in 1538.

⁶⁵For a survey of the various patristic and medieval theologians through whose work Luther likely came into contact with this image, see Uwe Rieske-Braun, *Duellum mirabile*, 115-226, and especially 171-8. See also Theobald Beer, *Der fröhliche Wechsel und Streit*, 328; 346-7. Beer, of course, must try to argue that, although Luther closely echoes many of these antecedents, he actually warps their thought in a way that disfigures chalcidian Christology. The present author is not convinced that the essential features of Luther’s use of this theme differ in any dramatic way from what one finds in the patristics and medievals that Beer and Rieske-Braun cites. Luther conducts the metaphor’s emphasis in his own way, to be sure, but the governing soteriological mechanics are the same so far as the functional alignment of Christ’s two natures is concerned.

⁶⁶One especially clear example of this sequence appears in an Easter sermon delivered on March 31, 1521. WA 9, 661. Here Luther states: “Der Todt schlecht den rachen daher und will die Person fressen, wie er allen menschen fressen hatt, trifft aber ein solch person, die do ist got und mensch. Got kan nicht sterben und styrbet dennoch nach der menscheit. Darumb gibt die schrift der gantzen person, was einem widerfart. Alß wen ainer an kopff verwundet wirt, Szo ist nur der leyb verwundet, dennoch sagt man, der menschs sey verwundet. Drumb wie leyb und seel ein mensch ist, Szo ist Christus ein person auß einem menschen und goth. Was der menscheit widerfart, Ist Christo widerfaren, und was Christus thut, das hat Got thut. Szo ist der Todt in dem leben erseufft, wie Paulus sagt. Drumb wirt in Christo alle sundt und boß gewis erseufft, Szo dw in yn glawbst, das es dir nichts thun kan. Das wirt anzeygt Iob 40, Do er sagt vom Behemoth ‘In oculis eius quasi hamo capiet eum’ &c. ‘An extrahere poteris Leviathan hamo’ &c. Eben wie der vischer den hamen sencket ins basser, das man in nicht siecht, mitt einem regenwurm, und kummet der visch, meinett, er woll in fressen, Schlecht mit dem rachen in hamen und wirt alßo gefangen. Szo auch hie mit Christo. Die angelschnur ist das geschlecht Jesu Christi von Abraham her, ist gebunden an die menschlich natur. Der angel ist die gotlich natur, die hat er anzogen mit der Menschlich, die hat muessen leyden und ist voracht gewest wie ein regenwurm. Do kam der tod und gedacht: har, ich wil in vorschlingen. Nymant sach, das er got waß: Szo meinett er, er woll den menschen fressen, Szo trifft er

“Christ died; death devoured the Son of God. But in doing so death swallowed a thorn and had to get rid of it. It was impossible for death to hold Him. For this Person is God; and since both God and man in one indivisible Person entered into the belly of death and the devil, death ate a morsel that ripped his stomach open.

It was the counsel of God the Father from eternity to destroy death, ruin the kingdom of the devil, and give the devil a little pill which he would gleefully devour, but which would create a great rumpus in his belly and in the world. Now the Lord wants to say: “Dear Nicodemus, it is miraculous, as you see, that God should spend such a great and precious treasure for our rebirth. For is it a miracle that I, the Son of man and the Son of God in one Person, am sacrificed to death and enter the jaws of death and the devil? But I shall not remain there. Not only will I come forth again, but I will also rip open deaths [sic] belly; for the poison is too potent, and death itself must die.”⁶⁷

The crucial element of this soteriological explanation is once again the *invulnerability* of Christ’s divinity. The solidarity of God in Christ, for Luther, does *not* mean that the divine nature comes to share in frailty and weakness. To align Luther’s soteriology and Christology in this way is to invert its fundamental logic. It is precisely because Christ *cannot* be harmed or destroyed according to His divine nature that He can plunge into the abyss of human affliction, and emerge victorious.⁶⁸

Why, then, is Christ described by Luther as simultaneously vulnerable *and* invulnerable? It is because both ascriptions belong properly to Him as one who is both

gotth. Do wirt er gefangen, und Christus zeeucht in her fuer und macht in zcu schanden fur aller welt.” For an extensive record of the many occurrences of this metaphor within Luther’s corpus, see Theobald Beer, *Der fröhliche Wechsel und Streit*, 339-44. See also Hans-Martin Barth, *Der Teuffel und Jesus Christus in der Theologie Martin Luthers*, 77, esp. n. 496.

⁶⁷LW 22, 355. WA 47, 80. “Christus ist gestorben und hatt der Tod den Sohn Gottes verschlungen, aber der tod hatt an ihme einen angel geschlungen, das er ihnen hat müssen widergeben, den es wahr unmüglich, das ehr im tode bleiben soltte. Den die person ist gott, und do Gott und Mensch in einer person, unzertrennet, in des todes und Teuffels bauch gefharen ist, so hatt der tod ein bisslein an ime gessen das ihme den Bauch zureist. Das ist auch Gottes des vaters rath von ewigkeit gewesen, das ehr also den tod verschlingen und des Teuffels reich zerstören wolte und dem Teuffel ein kleine pillen geben, die ehr mitt lust fressen soltt, aber darmit in seinem bauche und in der welt ein solch gerumpel anrichten. Nun will der herr sagen: Lieber Nicodeme, du sihest recht ein Mirackel, das Gott einen solchen grossen, theuern schatz an unser Widergeburtt wendet. Den ist es nicht ein wunderwerck, das ich des menschen Sohn und Gottes Sohn bin, in einer person, und in den todt dahin gegeben, das ich dem Teuffel und tode in rachen fhare? Aber ich werde nicht drinnen bleiben und nicht allein wider heraus fharen, sondern ime auch den bauch zerreißen, den die gifft ist zu starck, das der tod mus dran sterben.”

⁶⁸To remove this affirmation from Luther’s vocabulary is to collapse his soteriology, at least so far as it touches upon the redeeming work of Christ in freeing human beings from suffering and death.

fully human and fully divine. Both are deemed by Luther to be soteriologically necessary in the following way. The frailty of humanity is essential in order for Christ truly to enter into solidarity with sinners in their abject condition of affliction and weakness. Like other human beings, Christ suffers, experiences fear, and bears the sting of corruption at its fullest extent. But, for all this, He is not destroyed. This is because Christ, for Luther, is no *mere* man. He remains fully divine even at the nadir of His condescension, and retains all the properties pertaining thereunto. This retention of unaltered divine properties is necessary for Luther's soterio-logic to function properly. If Christ's divine nature were diminished by condescension and made to be weak even as the humanity is weak, then Christ would be utterly devoured in the abyss.⁶⁹

Luther does not believe that Christ's divinity and its attendant properties are 'conditioned' by His human weakness, but rather '*clothed*' by it. He expresses as much in a sermon on John 4, from 1540.

"Therefore since we could not bear to hear God in His majesty, He humbly adopted flesh and blood, assuming not only our nature, that is, flesh and blood, but also all the frailties with which body and soul are afflicted, as, for example, fear, sadness, anger, and hatred. This is really burying and concealing His divine majesty! Now this is preached to us. We are told that He was weak, that He was like any other man in body and soul, that He made Himself subject to all human infirmities, that He hungered and thirsted, that He experienced all the wants of flesh and blood. In this weakness the true and eternal God shows Himself. For me He humbles Himself; and for me He is finally crucified, although He is at the same time very God, who redeems me from sin and death."⁷⁰

⁶⁹This is the point that lies behind Luther's statement, which divergence interpreters often quote, that a Christ who suffers only as a human being would need His own savior. The point is not that the divine nature must also suffer, as many conclude it to be. Luther insists, rather, that a non-divine suffering Christ will be just as helpless in the face of death and corruptions as all other mortal flesh. He would be consumed and annihilated by the principalities of this world.

⁷⁰LW 22, 507. WA 47, 212. "Darumb so durffen wir Gott nicht hoeren in seiner Maiestet, do ehr dan untreglich ist, sondern ehr hat sich gesenckt auff's tieffste ins fleisch und bluth, das ehr nicht allein unser natur annimpt, das ist: leib und seel, Sondern auch alle gebrechen, die leib und seel anhangen, als furcht, traurigkeit, zorn, Hass &c.. Das heist ja tieff beschorren die gottliche Maiestet, und dasselbig wirdt uns geprediget, das ehr schwach sej und gleich sej als ein ander mensch an leib und Seel und alle gebrechen an sich genommen hab als ein anderer mensch, der do durstet und hungert und alles, was fleisch und bluth

In the incarnation, God genuinely reveals Himself to human beings. At the same time, however, and *precisely in so doing*, He also shields or ‘covers’ His true majesty from their sight.⁷¹ He presents Himself to the world in the form of frail humanity.⁷² God perpetrates no docetic masquerade in doing so, for Christ truly *is* human on account of the hypostatic union of divinity and humanity in Christ.⁷³ Nevertheless, despite this frail appearance and the underlying doctrinal reality it expresses, Christ’s *divinity* is not weak, nor can it ever become so. He remains ‘unconquerable life’ even *in the midst of death*, just as He remains ‘infinite righteousness’ even *in the likeness of sinful flesh*. If the divergence reception of Luther’s Christology were correct to conclude that the suffering and death of Christ is truly constitutive of the divine life, then why would this dialectic of revealing and covering be necessary? If God simply *is* what we see in the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, then Luther’s characterization of these events as a ‘covering’, and, in some cases as the revelation of God ‘under the form of His opposite’ makes no sense.

anhenget. In dieser schwachheit lest sich der ewige, warhafftige Gott finden und fur mich demuttiget ehr sich also bis ans creutz und ist gleichwohl warhafftiger Gott, der mich von sunden und todt erloset.” In a 1534 sermon, Luther also comments how the earthly appearance of Christ could often be an obstacle for faith to those who saw Him. Who could believe that such a weak person could be God Himself, the king of kings? See WA 37, 655.

⁷¹Luther reflects upon the hiddenness of God in Christ’s abject weakness in his 1544 commentary on Isaiah 53. It is because of this ‘covering’ that many in Jesus’ lifetime found it impossible to acknowledge His true identity. See WA 40/3, 711. This exposes another weakness of the divergence interpretation. If Christ reveals to human beings that God really suffers (I.E. displaces classical notions of God as immutable and impassible), then why is the self-revelation of God in Christ characterized by Luther as a veiling? If God *suffers*, why is the suffering of Christ described as a covering of God’s true majesty; in some cases, as a the revelation of God’s very *opposite*?

⁷²The interplay between appearance and reality is accentuated in Luther’s metaphorical description of death and Satan being ‘tricked’ by Christ’s ostensible weakness.

⁷³Christ, moreover, *really dies* in His humanity according to Luther. See his comments from 1544 in WA 40/3, 743.

That Christ is vulnerable *in humanity* and invulnerable *in divinity* is an abiding presupposition of Luther's soteriological mechanics. He invites this conclusion in the 1540 sermon's next statement:

"Thus the evangelist has a twofold message regarding Christ: first of all, he proclaims His glory and informs us that He comes to us in splendor and divine majesty that we might know that He is truly God; then he tells us that He also comes to us clad in weakness and in the greatest humility. When He died, he tore hell to shreds and removed sin, which is a divine work and reflects sheer deity. Then He also demonstrates that He is true man, when He decides to leave Judea and takes flight before those great prelates, the Pharisees, whom He, of course, could have felled with a breath."⁷⁴

The divinity of Christ is therefore not altered or conditioned by the frailty of its assumed humanity. This much is clear from the passages surveyed throughout this section. At the same time, the humanity of Christ *is* altered and conditioned by its union with incorruptible divinity. The deathless might of God inhabits the humanity of Christ, and enlivens His mortal flesh as fire radiates through glowing iron.⁷⁵ This is why it is not only

⁷⁴LW 22, 507. WA 47, 212-2. "Also prediget der Euangelist zweierley von Christo, Erstlich, das ehr hehrlich sej und in pracht und Gottlicher maestet zu uns komme. Darnach, das ehr auch in schwachheit und hochster demuth kompt, auff das wir wissen, ehr sej warhafftiger Gott. Dan ehr ist gestorben und hat die helle zuriessen, die sunden weggenommen, das ist eittel gottheit und eittel gottliche werck. Darnach beweist ehr, das ehr warhafftiger mensch sej, dan ehr fleucht und wil nicht in Judea bleiben fur den hehrlichen Prelaten, den Phariseern, die ehr doch kondte mit einem odem umblasen." The reader will note, in passing, how many of the citations provided in this section are derived from Luther's sermons on John from the late 1530's and early 1540's. This pattern is by design of the author, because it provides further corroboration of the point argued against Ngien in a previous chapter that these texts represent no exception to the rule in Luther's other writings that Christ does not suffer according to His divinity.

⁷⁵Luther reflects upon the divinization of Christ's flesh in relation to the eucharist in a sermon on John 6 from the early 1530's. WA 33, 190-91. "Darumb spricht Christus: 'das brott, das ich gebe, ist mein fleisch'. Was meinstu vor fleisch? nicht kalbfleisch oder riendt fleisch, so in stellen ist, das ist auch wohl sein fleisch, aber ehr saget: 'das ich geben werde fur das leben der welt', Es ist ein lebendig fleisch undt todt fleisch, so gestorben ist, das dardurch die gantze welt lebe. Do gehöret kein Iohannes Baptista noch Maria zu oder einiger Engel, Sondern diese einige person Christus, doran wil uns gott haben gefasset undt gebunden. Ausser der person, so von Maria geboren ist, undt hat warhafftig fleisch undt blutt undt ist gecreutzigt worden, sol man gott nicht suchen noch finden, den gott sol man allein durch den glauben ergreifen undt kriegenn im fleisch undt blutt, undt das das fleisch undt blutt nicht fleischert noch blutert undt doch fleisch undt blutt sei, Sondern beides vergöttert sei, wie ich den vom Zuckerwasser gesagt habe. Item Eisen, wen es ohne feur ist, so ists auch Eisen, wen es aber gluendt gemacht wirdt undt feur oder hitze drein kompt, so kan ich den sagen: dis eisen das eisert itzt nicht mehr, sondern es fewert gahr, Es ist wohl Eisen, aber es ist so gahr durchfeuert, das, wen du es sihest oder angreiffest, das dein auge nicht sagen kan: Es ist Eisen, Sondern du fhulest eitel feur, so gahr ist eitel feur fur augen. Wen du nun wilt ein loch

the *Person* of Christ that survives death. The humanity is restored and invigorated as well. Because Christ's humanity is united with God through an inseparable, though irreducibly distinct union, it too cannot finally be destroyed, but rises up in radiant immortality.⁷⁶ The glorification of Christ's flesh is thus a reality perceived in its fullness only in the resurrection, where the form of human weakness gives way to deathless vitality.⁷⁷ In all this, we see clearly that the logic of Luther's soteriology rests upon a christological sub-structure, which admits only a *mono-directional* doctrine of exchange between Christ's natures. The humanity is conditioned on account of its union with

darmit durch ein fas bohren oder ein zeichen auff etwas brennen oder machen, do thuts das Eisen nicht, Sondern das feur thuts, dan wen ich ein ander eisen neme, das nicht gluendt were, so wurde ich noch lange nicht ein Zeichen brennen, Sondern Jch mus das Eisen nemen, dorinnen das feur ist, undt widerumb wil das feur seine arbeit nirgends thun dan in dem Eisen. Also ist hie gott in Christo auch leibhaftig undt thut, wie ein gott thun sol, oder thut, wie das feur im eisen thut, man sihet wohl nur fleisch undt blutt, aber der glaube sihet einen solchen menschen, ein solch fleisch undt blutt, das do sei wie ein feurig eisen, den es ist durchgöttert." Despite the abject humility of its appearance, Christ's humanity genuinely mediates the fullness of divinity, and comes through union with it also to share in its majesty. The effect is likened metaphorically by Luther to golden coins enclosed within a purse. WA 47, 636. This christological pattern is the basis for Luther's reflection upon other, secondary media of God's presence such as Holy Scripture and the sacraments. The believer is tempted, by virtue of the lowly earthliness of God's chosen vessels, to doubt their legitimacy. For one example of this conceptual extension, see Luther's continuing discussion in the 1540 sermon on John 4 in WA 47, 212f.

⁷⁶According to Luther, only passing glimpses of this transformative union peek through the Gospel narratives of Jesus' life, as in the evident power operative in His miraculous works, or in the apocalyptic splendor of the transfiguration. See, for instance, the description in Hans-Martin Barth, *Der Teufel und Jesus Christus in der Theologie Martin Luthers* 46; and Sammeli Juntunen, "The Christological Background of Luther's Understanding of Justification", 29.

⁷⁷For an example of this contrast, see Uwe Rieske-Braun, *Duellum mirabile*, 205. This does *not* mean for Luther that Christ ceases to be human. His is, however, a 'divinized' humanity, different in some important respects from the corruptible flesh of other human beings wholly conquered by the grave. See, for instance, the following comments from a 1527 controversial text on the sacrament. WA 23, 243. "Es mangelt den schwermern alles daran, das sie Christus leib 'nicht unterscheiden' (wie S. Paulus sagt .1. Cor. xi.) von anderm fleisch und reden nicht anders davon denn als were es ein vergenglich verdewlich verzerlich fleisch, das man ynn denn scherren keufft und ynn der kuchen kocht. So grobe hempel sind sie, das sie nicht sehen, wie dis fleisch ist ein unvergenglich unsterblich unverweslich fleisch, wie der .xv. Psalm singet von yhm: 'Du wirst deinen heiligen nicht lassen verwesen, Und mein fleisch wird rugen ynn hoffnunge'. Der tod hat sich wol ein mal dran versucht und wolts verzeren und verdawen, Aber er kund nicht, sondern es zureis yhm den bauch und hals mehr denn ynn hundert tausent stuck, das dem tod die zeene zu stoben und zu flogen sind, und bleib lebendig. Denn die speise war dem tod zu stark und hat den freßer verzeret und verdawet. Es ist Gott ynn diesem fleisch, Ein Gotts fleisch, Ein geistfleisch ists, Es ist ynn Gott und Gott."

deathless, invulnerable divinity, but the latter suffers none of the defects that apply to Christ on account of His human nature.

Why is it then, on the basis of all these considerations, that Luther is so adamant that the *suffering* Christ be fully God? Why must *God* plunge to the low-point of the scale, and how is the ‘divinity’ of the suffering Christ soteriologically necessary? The answer to all these questions hinges upon Luther’s abiding insistence upon the invulnerability of Christ’s divine nature. The suffering Christ must be fully God, because only a person invulnerable in divinity can withstand the awful power of death and hell, and tear it to shreds. It is on account of this deathless might that Luther confesses Christ to be *dominus mortis*, the ‘Lord over death’.⁷⁸ All that afflicts weary sinners in body and soul genuinely collapses upon Him in the weakness of His humanity. These powers, however, cannot finally destroy Him. They expend themselves against Him, and break apart upon His deathless might.⁷⁹ Thus, Christ taunts the devil, saying: “Oh Devil, all evil has fallen upon me, and yet I live!”⁸⁰ The ‘passibilist symmetry’ advanced by the divergence interpretation fails in its apprehension of Luther’s insistence upon the suffering of God, because it overlooks the critical function of divine invulnerability

⁷⁸Luther refers to Christ as the Lord over life and death in a sermon preached in 1525. See WA 17/1, 79. He also refers to Him as the Lord over death and Satan in a sermon of 1529. WA 29, 290b.

⁷⁹A crucial instance of this motif appears in Luther 1544 commentary on Isaiah 53. WA 40/3, 721. “Deus posuerat illum, ut ferret impetum Satanae, mortis, legis, totius mundi et omnium hominum peccata; peccatum occidit eum, sed eum, qui occidi non potuit; occisus secundum nativitatem carnis, et tamen dicitur vere occisus filius Dei. Non potuit occidi propter illum aculeum in Euangelio, quod ipse Deus vivus, ut dicit: ‘Ego vivo, et vos vivetis’; Ego quidem morior pro vobis, sed tamen moriendo vivam, quia Deus sum et homo. Mors potest me mordere et occidere, sed retinere non poterit in morte.” For another text that refers to all evil being expended upon Christ, see *ibid.*, 731. Luther expresses Christ’s destruction of death in a more visceral way by dubbing Him ‘Todfresser’ in a sermon of 1537. WA 45, 43b.

⁸⁰WA 15, 518. This statement is taken from a sermon on the resurrection delivered in 1524.

within the soterio-logic that accompanies this insistence. In a previous section, the resultant construal has been represented in the following way:

Guiding Principle: The radical solidarity of God as sympathetic suffering.

Requisite Conceptual Sub-Structure: A Christology of divine vulnerability.

Soteriological Mechanics: The dialectical historicity of God.

In the light of the argument developed throughout the remainder of the chapter, however, the following structural summary is clearly preferable.

Guiding Principle: The radical solidarity of God as site of eschatological battle

Requisite Conceptual Sub-Structure: A Christology of divine invulnerability

Soteriological Mechanics: The deathless might of God victorious over the powers of corruption

Conclusion

In the course of this chapter, no attempt has been made to furnish a comprehensive treatment of Luther's theology of salvation. Neither has it been suggested or implied that the relation of impassible divinity to the suffering solidarity of Christ constitutes a central focal point of Luther's soteriological vision. It has sought merely to evaluate the 'passibilist symmetry' postulated by proponents of the divergence thesis, and assess its widespread claim to legitimacy. In order thoroughly to refute the accuracy of the 'passibilist symmetry', the present chapter has proceeded in three stages. The first examined aspects of Luther's larger theological framework that together serve to situate the narrower question of divine suffering within the landscape of his soteriology. The second section demonstrated that the textual evidence adduced in defense of a passibilist interpretation of Luther's soteriology is deeply problematic. A careful examination of the pertinent texts shows that Luther unambiguously affirms the doctrine of divine impassibility. The third major section cemented this criticism by furnishing a synthetic

re-presentation of Luther's reflection upon the immanence of God in the sufferings of Christ. This alternative highlighted the extent to which a divergence understanding of these matters inverts the conceptual mechanics of Luther's soteriology. A Christ vulnerable *according to His divinity* would be, for Luther, a Christ who simply could not redeem. Only if Christ's divinity remains wholly incorruptible in the jaws of death can Christ plunge into humanity's low estate, and rise up victorious from it.

This chapter concludes the historical portion of this study. As such, it is worthwhile briefly to take inventory of what has so far been argued. The first chapter of this study suggested that a divergence reception of Luther's Christology relies for its historically-traced legitimacy upon three, sequentially organized assumptions:

1. That Luther re-calibrates the traditional theology of the hypostatic union in order to accommodate an insistence upon suffering divinity.
2. That Luther espouses a soteriological vision that both requires and openly affirms the sympathetic sufferings of Christ's divine nature.
3. That these two basic doctrinal modifications effect as their consequence an implication-laden adjustment to the doctrine of God, which consists primarily in the intrinsic historicization of divine being.

Chapters two and three demonstrated that stages one and two of this logical progression are historically unjustified. Because of this demonstration, it naturally follows that the divergence reception of Luther's theology reflected in the third stage of this summary rests upon a highly tenuous understanding of Luther's theology. Theologians and historians may continue, of course, to insist upon theological or philosophical grounds that Luther *ought* to have pursued these various conceptual adjustments. They may even make the case that adjustments of this sort *would* have comported well with many of Luther's most basic theological insights; at least as these insights are perceived from the

retrospective vantage point of contemporary concerns.⁸¹ So far as any *real* fissure between Luther and the doctrine of divine impassibility is concerned however, all such arguments must confine themselves to the domain of subjunctive, volative, or optative description, and take care no longer to eclipse the fact that historical evidence for such a fissure simply does not exist.⁸²

⁸¹Of course, such an argument would need to admit that Luther perceived the logic of his soteriology to point in exactly the opposite direction. For him, the ontological invulnerability of Christ's divinity possesses axiomatic importance. A removal of this commitment may build upon elements of Luther's emphasis, but directs the theological raw material to an alien purpose.

⁸²That is, one may explore whether Luther's Christology and soteriology *could, would, might* or *ought* have rejected the doctrine of divine impassibility, but must admit, in doing so, that Luther *did* no such thing.

DEATHLESS MIGHT IN THE FORM OF MORTAL WEAKNESS: TOWARDS A RENOVATED APPROPRIATION OF LUTHER'S CHRISTOLOGY

In light of all that has been argued to this point in this study, the present chapter turns to a question of constructive theological import: how is Luther's Christology significant for modern reflection upon the immanence of God in Christ? Taken as a whole, the divergence thesis represents an attempt to provide a substantive response to this question. Despite its widespread appeal, this proposal fails because it builds a constructive edifice upon a fractured historical foundation. The passibilist symmetry, which stands at the base of a divergence reception, represents a mistaken specification of Luther's christological views. In its association of Luther with modern reconfigurations of the doctrine of God, the divergence thesis does not extend, but contradicts the reformer's Christology. This counter-verdict consolidates, *in nuce*, what the preceding chapters of this study have sought, from a variety of critical angles, to demonstrate. The salient consequence of this argument, as it pertains to the question addressed in this chapter, is that constructive appraisals of Luther's ongoing significance ought no longer to proceed under the assumption that the reformer's Christology advances a recalibration of the *communicatio idiomatum* for the sake of a soteriologically-ordered, participatory suffering of Christ's divine nature. Trajectories that begin the complicated process of appropriating Luther's Christology with this assumption set out upon a wayward heading.¹

This critical verdict, however, does not represent progress in the attempt to reconsider the nature of Luther's ongoing significance. It does not yet provide any

¹This point is binding only to the extent that such trajectories purport to extend historically legitimate aspects of Luther's theology.

indication of how contemporary appropriations of Luther's Christology ought to proceed in the wake of the divergence thesis' refutation. In its attempt to address these subsidiary concerns, this chapter presupposes that the problem with the divergence thesis is not the mere fact *that* it tries to retrieve Luther's insights for modern consideration. If Luther had executed a passibilist reconfiguration of two-nature Christology, then the divergence reception would represent a fairly non-controversial appraisal of the reformer's significance in the history of dogma. The presupposed reconfiguration, however, is not valid. What are the implications of this verdict for the reception of Luther's theology? More to the point: how ought Luther's contemporary significance be re-calibrated in accordance with a non-divergence interpretation of his Christology?

The multi-faceted argument advanced in previous chapters has hollowed out the necessary space in which to address these constructive questions, although the present chapter can hope only to scratch the surface of the necessary receptive adjustment. The basis of its preliminary response to constructive question resides in the multiply significant observation, developed in earlier chapters, that Luther's Christology treats the radical immanence of God in Christ and the doctrine of divine impassibility not as mutually cancelling, but mutually *reinforcing* theological commitments. The non-competitive 'symmetry' that emerges between these commitments in Luther's theology blatantly disrupts the historical letter of the divergence reception. It also challenges the constructive theological 'spirit', which has encouraged its proliferation. It represents the contravention of a widely presumed doctrinal antinomy between these commitments, and therein lies both its destructive and *constructive* dogmatic potential.²

²Luther's Christology is deconstructive in the sense that it tears down prevalent presuppositions about how God's immanence ought to be conceptualized. It is *constructive* in the sense that Luther also

The present chapter, then, deals no longer entirely within the circumscribed confines of historical inquiry as such. In its attempt to re-map the contours of Luther's *contemporary* significance within the light of a non-divergence presentation of his Christology, the forthcoming investigation is obliged to engage intellectual currents, questions and concerns, many of which are inescapably foreign to Luther's 16th century frame of reference. This does not mean, however, that the gleaned insights of historical exegesis are left behind, or somehow bracketed in the interest of securing contemporary relevance. The goal of this chapter is to reflect, in a historically responsible manner, upon legitimate ways in which Luther's christological ideas may 'transition forward' and engage constructively with major currents of modern theological reflection.³

Setting the Stage for Constructive Engagement: The Relation between Impassibility and Immanence within Recent Theology

It is characteristic of a great deal of recent theology frankly to suppose that the doctrine of divine impassibility simply cannot be reconciled with a robust acknowledgment of God's immanence in Christ. These commitments are presumed to signify conceptual affirmations, which stand unavoidably at odds with one another. A major reason for the widespread perception of this antinomy is the conceptual specification of 'impassibility', which its alleged incompatibility with God's immanence presupposes. Impassibility, this antinomy suggests, is essentially a conceptual byproduct of divine transcendence poorly understood. It denotes an aloof deity, differentiated from

cares deeply about expressing the immanence of God, and thus shares the goal of contemporary theology, even if he adopts an alternative means of securing it.

³The potential difficulties associated with this receptive enterprise are sufficient to warrant a discussion of a few neuralgic, methodological considerations. Readers concerned about the task of theological reception may consult this discussion as it appears in the 'appendix' of this study.

finite reality by the insertion of quantitative, ontological distance.⁴ To be ‘impassible’, according to this construal, is to be ‘remote and detached’; to be essentially *removed* from any substantive involvement in events that include change or defect.⁵ This rendering of God’s otherness falters, because it creates insurmountable obstacles for affirming biblical portrayals of God as intimately involved in the events of human history. In other words, it forecloses a robust affirmation of divine immanence. Immanence, after all, denotes the very opposite of unsullied abstraction. It suggests a radical and meaningful proximity; a relation of intimate presence, or closeness. An agent who is ‘immanent’, in short, is one who draws near and enters into the circumstances of another.

Thus specified, divine impassibility and divine immanence appear for many contemporary theologians to represent two extremes of a univocally polarized spectrum. By specifying the ‘otherness’ of God in terms of ontological remoteness divine impassibility appears to describe divine transcendence *quantitatively*, and thus

⁴That is, God is distinguished from the sphere of finite existents, by the insistence that He is entirely removed from any involvement in its malleabilities.

⁵Books within contemporary theology, which take issue with the doctrine of divine impassibility are legion. One example of its equation with ‘remoteness’ is to be found in Heribert Mühlen, *Die Veränderlichkeit Gottes als Horizont einer zukünftigen Christologie* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1969), 8-9. A helpful overview of reasons for the widespread contemporary rejection of this doctrine is available in Paul S. Fiddes *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 16-45. A sampling of the myriad recent publications that address the debate over divine suffering include Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame, 2000); D. Stephen Long, *Speaking of God: Theology, Language, and Truth* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Wililam B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2009); David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003); David Bentley Hart, "No shadow of turning: on divine impassibility." *Pro Ecclesia* 11, no. 2 (March 1, 2002): 184-206; James Keating and Thomas Joseph White, *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering* (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2009); Daniel Castelo, *The Apathetic God: Exploring the Contemporary Relevance of Divine Impassibility* (Milton Keynes, U.K.: Paternoster, 2009); Richard E. Creel, *Divine Impassibility: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Paul L. Gavriluk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought*, The Oxford Early Christian studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). A fuller bibliographical overview of its scope and origins may be found in the citations contained within these materials.

intrinsically to proscribe any affirmation of God's immanence whatsoever.⁶ The attempt to maintain both simultaneously terminates in descriptive incoherence. A conceptual integration of these commitments would require one absurdly to suggest that God is involved, yet uninvolved; intimately close, yet infinitely remote—a being Who is immanent, and yet *not* immanent at one and the same time. To define God as immanent and impassible is to embrace contradiction in principle. Those who do so tear open a fissure of meaning, which runs through the heart of pre-modern conceptualizations of deity. A lot of contemporary theologians presume the mutual exclusivity of immanence and impassibility on the basis of this description. They insist, in effect, that impassibility must give way to *Immanuel*; the God who truly is *with us* (immanence).⁷

For most, impassibility is but one manifestation of a much deeper conceptual polarity that stretches across traditional reflection on the doctrine of God.⁸ The putative source of this polarity is presumed widely to be an early philosophical corruption in the history of mainstream dogmatic development, in which pagan conceptualities were

⁶By 'quantitative', I refer to a mode of negotiating the God-world relation, which locates God upon the same plane of being or existence as finite existents. Within such a framework, the only way to express God's transcendence is to abstract His being from all proximate contact with creation. Accordingly, impassibility manifests an underlying zero-sum ontological game in which God and the world exist under the same metaphysical umbrella and must therefore, in a sense, compete for space. The distinction is quantitative, because God's being is charted on the same 'plane' as it were, simply ontologically enlarged in order to highlight his otherness. For many theologians, as the following discussion will demonstrate, this mode of locating divine otherness (or transcendence) gets at the heart of the problem. This particular vocabulary is taken from Reinhard Hauber, "Christologie und metaphysischer Gottesbegriff bei Werner Elert" *Kerygma und Dogma* 35 (1989): 136, although the same theme shows up in the work of theologians other than Elert, whom Hauber is describing.

⁷Jürgen Moltmann suggests, for instance, that a God who is deemed impassible would need to be "evacuated" away from any involvement with the man Jesus, who hangs upon the cross. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 214.

⁸They are indicative, for Werner Elert, of an underlying bad metaphysics. See Volker Keding, "Wider das Apathieaxiom: Die theopaschitische Christologie des späten Elert und ihre Wirkungsgeschichte" in *Mit dem Menschen verhandeln über den Sachgehalt des Evangeliums: die Bedeutung der Theologie Werner Elerts für die Gegenwart*, eds. Rudolf Keller and Michael Roth (Erlangen: Martin-Luther-Verlag, 2004), 97.

allowed to stand alongside authentically Christian insights. The problem enters when such conceptualities are permitted subsequently to fulfill a criteriological function in the codification of church dogma.⁹ The resultant admixture of commitments can never progress beyond mere juxtaposition. This is because, as the doctrines of divine immanence and divine impassibility illustrate, they signify mutually exclusive conceptualizations of God's being. Their dogmatic integration has generated a series of theologically descriptive incompatibilities. The result of the philosophical corruption, again, is an unresolved fissure of doctrinal meaning, which tears the doctrine of God into two, conceptually divergent ascriptive compartments.¹⁰

The critical perspective summarized in the previous paragraph does not necessarily require a uniform repudiation of pre-modern developments of dogma. To be sure, patristic and medieval theologians labor extensively and expertly to achieve a coherent synthesis among the intrinsically disparate trajectories of its multiform conceptual patrimony. Some contemporary theologians are eager to identify a measure of progress within this struggle for dogmatic integrity. Wolfhart Pannenberg insists, for instance, that early Christian thinkers subtly modify pagan philosophical commitments as these commitments are enlisted in the service of theological inquiry. The resultant 'christianization of Hellenism', which this relatively circumspect appraisal of dogmatic

⁹The polarity, in other words, is built into the classic statements of Christian orthodoxy, even if most contemporary theologians who accept a version of this view go on to insist that the problematic elements may be shorn away without forfeiting orthodoxy's doctrinal essence.

¹⁰So, Pannenberg comments: "Die Gedanken von Gott als Weltprinzip und als freim Herrn der Geschichte bleiben within unausgeglichen nebeneinander stehen. Die unterschiedliche Herkunft der Elemente des altkirchlichen Gottesbegriffs blieb daher aufdringlich sichtbar. Die großen, umfassenden Konzeptionen verknüpften die heterogenen Elemente doch nur oberflächlich." Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Die Aufnahme des philosophischen Gottesbegriffs als dogmatisches Problem der frühchristlichen Theologie" *Zeitschrift Für Kirchengeschichte* 70, no. 1-2 (January 1, 1959): 43.

development expresses, markedly *attenuates* the severity of the underlying polarity.¹¹

Despite this concession, however, Pannenberg persists in the fundamentally critical verdict. The assimilating progress of early Christian development expires well short of an ultimately satisfying doctrinal integrity. The prolonged attempt doctrinally to integrate the necessary, metaphysical *Weltprinzip* of Hellenistic thought, with the free triune God revealed through Christ thus proves finally to be unsuccessful.¹² The polarity lingers because the disparate conceptual commitments of theology's past fundamentally resist harmonization.¹³

For those who share this diagnostic analysis of the early church, classical formulations of two-nature Christology do not heal, but rather ossify the underlying polarity into a formalized system of bifurcating analysis. The bad fissure coalesces, as it were, into an authorized grammar. This grammar legitimates the juxtaposition of statements, which appear otherwise obviously contradictory, beneath the misleading appearance of some higher, metaphysical unity. The traditional doctrine of the

¹¹Pannenberg affirms the task of theology's engagement with pagan thought forms, and is therefore less harsh in his evaluation of the apologists, for instance, than either von Harnack or Loofs. Nevertheless, he still believes there is legitimacy to the charge of 'hellenization' even once the severity of the charge is somewhat softened. See, for instance, Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Die Aufnahme des philosophischen Gottesbegriffs als dogmatisches Problem der frühchristlichen Theologie", 15-6.

¹²So, although Pannenberg acknowledges the importance of early Christianity's sustained interaction with pagan thought (thus softening the verdict advanced by Loofs and von Harnack), he ultimately concludes: "Diese Aufgabe kritischer Umschmelzung des philosophischen Gottesgedankens ist in der frühchristlichen Theologie nicht von Grund auf gestellt und nicht allseitig durchgeführt worden." Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Die Aufnahme des philosophischen Gottesbegriffs als dogmatisches Problem der frühchristlichen Theologie", 45.

¹³That is: It is logically impossible for theology and Greek philosophy to share the same criteriological air space without one implicitly displacing the other. See Reinhard Hauber, "Christologie und metaphysischer Gottesbegriff bei Werner Elert", 141; and 143. Hauber also suggests on page 145 that a retention of divine immutability (part of this philosophical inheritance) requires theology to create two 'sectors' of God's existence. See also Heribert Mühlen, *Die Veränderlichkeit Gottes*, 19-20. Eberhard Jüngel speaks in terms of an 'aporia'. See *God As the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 39-42, 203.

communicatio idiomatum is the locus where the smuggled polarity materializes most blatantly. It not only permits, but actually *encourages* the application of mutually exclusive predicates to the Son of God by way of logical-semantic distinctions. One is licensed to assert, for instance, that the Son of God suffers and yet does not suffer; that He changes, and yet remains the same; that He is all-powerful, and yet frail; that He is radically immanent with human beings, and yet never ceases to be the simple, immutable, impassible, and radically transcendent God. By justifying such bifurcations christologically, this discourse *appears* to reconcile the underlying incoherence. In reality, however, the *communicatio idiomatum* only explicates and widens the preexisting fissure.¹⁴ Christology in the tradition of Chalcedon is not a solution, but an *exacerbation* of the problem. Its conceptually bifurcating grammar is an enabler. It allows subsequent reflection to retain and promulgate the immiscible conceptual polarity. The culprit, in all

¹⁴Heribert Mühlen therefore denigrates two-nature theology as a docetic façade. See *Die Veränderlichkeit Gottes*, 16-7. Moltmann is similarly critical in *The Crucified God*, 227-35. He states: "But theological reflection was not in a position to identify God himself with the suffering and death of Jesus. As a result of this, traditional Christology came very near to docetism, according to which Jesus only appeared to suffer and only appeared to die abandoned by God: this did not happen in reality. The intellectual bar to this came from the philosophical concept of God, according to which God's being is incorruptible, unchangeable, indivisible, incapable of suffering and immortal; human nature, on the other hand, is transitory, changeable, divisible, capable of suffering and mortal. The doctrine of the two natures in Christ began from this fundamental distinction, in order to be able to conceive of the personal union of the two natures in Christ in the light of this difference." This excerpt appears on pages 227-28. See also, Volker Keding, "Wider das Apathieaxiom", 92. Keding demonstrates how Elert believed the fundamental problem with classical Christology is that it ironically did not allow the incarnation to determine what is true about God, but allowed a predetermined doctrine of God to stipulate what is true of Christ. This is why Elert refers to Chalcedon as a 'fall' of sorts, as Keding describes on page 94. Reinhard Hauber reinforces this verdict, when he surmises (in a manner reminiscent of Schwarz) that classical Christology presumes, *a priori*, that God and humanity *cannot* be united. Thus, he insists, the problems of classical Christology only emerge if one operates with a non-christologically determined doctrine of God. Chalcedon tries, of course, to resolve this tension, but ends up with two subjects. See Reinhard Hauber, "Christologie und metaphysischer Gottesbegriff bei Werner Elert", 135; 155-7. For similar conclusions, see Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Christologie und Theologie." *Kerygma Und Dogma* 21, no. 3 (July 1, 1975): 164; "Die Aufnahme des philosophischen Gottesbegriffs als dogmatisches Problem der frühchristlichen Theologie", 31; and Eberhard Jüngel, "Vom Tod des lebendigen Gottes : ein Plakat." *Zeitschrift Für Theologie Und Kirche* 65, no. 1 (January 1, 1968): 100

this, is an exaggerated, and wrongly specified polarity between divine transcendence and divine immanence of which the doctrine of impassibility is but one, especially blatant manifestation. The classically developed doctrine of God originates and terminates in incoherence.

Healing the Polarity with Wittenberg Balm?

According to the divergence reception, Luther's theological contribution to contemporary theology is that he heals the fatal polarity *christologically* by eliminating impassibility as a legitimate designation of the incarnate Son of God in His divine nature. From this preliminary entry point, Luther inaugurates an implicit reconfiguration of God's transcendent otherness, which is no longer constrained by philosophical assumptions that tend in the direction of 'detached remoteness'. Luther's Christology purifies the immiscible mixture of philosophy and theology precisely where the absurd juxtaposition reaches its dogmatic climax.¹⁵ He burns off the Hellenistic dross of traditional reflection, and resolves the latent polarity by driving away its underlying 'pseudo-god'; the abstract *Weltgrund* of pagan philosophical projection.¹⁶ By doing so, Luther appears to anticipate and point the way forward to a whole host of modern theological trajectories, which seek likewise to heal the fateful polarity afflicting classical

¹⁵In other words, Luther is supposed to reverse what classical reflection upon Christ gets exactly backwards. The latter begins with a set doctrine of God and then squeezes christological reflection within its parameters. Luther's procedure is precisely the opposite. It allows the incarnation itself to inform our doctrine of God. In this way, Luther's contribution is an enormous privileging of theology over philosophy. See, for instance, Volker Keding, "Wider das Apathieaxiom", 92-3. A similar reflection upon the importance of Luther's Christology is to be found in Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 232-5.

¹⁶Eberhard Jüngel suggests, for instance, that Luther's debate with Zwingli is significant because it specifies: "von woher sich der *Gottesbegriff* theologisch zu konstituieren hat." Eberhard Jüngel, "Vom Tod des lebendigen Gottes", 103.

accounts of the divine being.¹⁷ Many practitioners of this restorative venture explicitly single out Luther among its earliest progenitors, but this is by no means universally the case. The trend here in mind extends well beyond the circumscribed reaches of Luther's personal reception-history.¹⁸

How do recent theologians propose the polarity ought to be mended? A cursory survey of modern discourse in this area unveils a degree of variety that makes any comprehensive response to this question infeasible. Most proposals share in common, however, a generic attempt to reconfigure the relation between divine transcendence and divine immanence in such a way that the two are no longer situated upon a univocally polarized spectrum, which precludes their peaceful coexistence. Permutations of this proposal tend to insist, in particular, that conceptualizations of God's transcendence must be recalibrated, since a corruption in this area is supposed to be primarily culpable for the fatal polarity's development in the first place. The goal, as Werner Elert helpfully expresses it, is to formulate a 'qualitative', rather than 'quantitative' specification of God's ontological otherness; an account that avoids artificially driving transcendence and immanence apart onto two antithetical poles of a univocal spectrum, which therefore can

¹⁷ Another, very prominent permutation of this trajectory is the tendency within contemporary trinitarian theologies to eschew any distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity, or at least to deny that this distinction somehow protects the impassible integrity of the divine essence. Most who adopt this approach claim to follow in the footsteps of Karl Rahner. For a helpful analysis of the range of perspective included within this trend, see Fred Sanders, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity: Rahner's Rule and the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

¹⁸ In other words, although a divergence reception of Luther's theology has often provided impetus and support to these trajectories, it is important to note that their contemporary emergence is the result of multiple factors beyond mere Luther interpretation. The theologians surveyed in this section do tend to cite Luther, but the themes their work represents is shared by many who do not. Again, the point in this section is not to focus upon the merits of these trajectories as an extension of Luther, but to see how Luther (as reinterpreted in non-divergence fashion) might make a contribution within contemporary discourse. The fact that a wayward interpretation of Luther happens to have funded major aspects of this discourse is, for the purposes of this chapter, only incidentally significant.

never be joined somewhere in the middle.¹⁹ The most sophisticated permutations of this approach do not wish to overcome the distinction altogether (as if God were somehow *only* immanent), but seek rather to complicate it in such a way that God's transcendence does not *restrict* His capacity for immanence, but actually *enables* it.²⁰ Eberhard Jüngel helpfully represents this goal when he explains:

“The God who is in heaven *because* he cannot be on earth is replaced by the Father who is in heaven in such a way that his heavenly kingdom can come *into the world*, that is, a God who is in heaven in *such a way* that he can *identify himself* with the poverty of the man Jesus, with the existence of a man brought from life to death on the cross.”²¹

Perhaps the most prominent constructive avenue enlisted to secure this ‘polarity complication’ without loss to either transcendence or immanence, is the widespread suggestion that God sovereignly chooses, or elects (in freedom) to exist in co-suffering immanence with His creation. In this way, divine sympathetic involvement does not come at the cost of God's transcendence. It is not the result of external constraint or coercion (as if God's being were simply tangled up in the same exigencies experienced by finite creatures), but emerges from an internal movement of God's free will. God is ontologically conditioned by His interactions with creatures, in short, because He

¹⁹Reinhard Hauber, “Christologie und metaphysischer Gottesbegriff bei Werner Elert”, 136. I am using Elert's rendering of the distinction as a useful description for what many other theologians propose, albeit sometimes with a different vocabulary.

²⁰Paul Fiddes helpfully demonstrates the extent to which this prescriptive problematic echoes through the halls of contemporary theology, in various varieties and forms. See *The Creative Suffering of God*, 110-43. The final paragraph of this section represents Fiddes' constructive proposal, which nicely expresses the polarity complication that I am here trying to describe. “The transcendence of a suffering God can only be understood as a transcendent suffering, not a transcendence beyond suffering. Only the thought of God as Trinity can make sense of transcendent suffering, for only a God who happens as an event of relationships can be both other than and yet inclusive of the world. He can include all suffering in himself as he includes all human relationships, yet he is other than the world in his unique suffering, taking our suffering into himself out of the depths of the more profound and terrible suffering which remains his own.”

²¹Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 209.

determines that it should be so.²² The ostensible dogmatic gain, in specifying transcendence in this way, is the fact that God's otherness is no longer bound by a restrictive philosophical framework, which ironically *limits* divine freedom precisely where it seeks most ardently to protect it.

It avoids stipulating *a priori* what God can and cannot do, as divine impassibility is assumed somewhat egregiously to do. It deflects the imposition of philosophical conceptualities, which specify, on the basis of deductive reasoning, which properties ought to apply abstractly to 'divinity', which pagan philosophical projection presumes to be the metaphysical foundation of all that exists.²³ It is perhaps rather ironic that the perceived problem with the classical rendering, as explicated in the adjudications of recent theologians, is that it grossly *underestimates* the extent of God's otherness.²⁴ Quantitative accounts implicitly confine reflection upon God's being to an ontologically closed system. They do this by defining God as the world's metaphysical base—a philosophically abstracted plane of stability hovering undisturbed above or beneath the

²²See Fiddes discussion of this view in *ibid.*, 66-71. How exactly God's self-election for suffering is explained varies somewhat dramatically from theologian to theologian. The strategy itself represents an important aspect of Karl Barth's ongoing legacy, although it remains a point of somewhat rancorous contention whether Barth *himself* espoused a version of this view; and if he did, what exactly he meant by it.

²³This characterization of Greek philosophy is extremely prominent, as is the assumption that early Christian theology's attempt to reason about God in a similar way has hamstrung its ability to speak clearly about the God revealed in Christ. See, for instance Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Die Aufnahme des philosophischen Gottesbegriffs als dogmatisches Problem der frühchristlichen Theologie, 5; 28; and 43. Note also Reinhard Hauber, "Christologie und metaphysischer Gottesbegriff bei Werner Elert", 128; 161-2; Heribert Mühlen, *Die Veränderlichkeit Gottes*, 7; 15; and Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 214. Eberhard Jüngel also develops the thesis that the defect in classical, metaphysical determinations of God's being, which is intensified with the advent of modernity, is that God's being is defined in terms of 'necessity'—a kind of ontological prop designed to secure the stability of the world, or human security. This, however, is inescapably at odds with what Jüngel considers to be faithful reflection upon God through God's own self-revelation. In theology's attempt to do both, there tears open an aporia in the tradition. See, for instance, Eberhard Jüngel, *God As the Mystery of the World*, 249.

²⁴Pannenberg insists that theology needs a more *radical* account of God's otherness; an otherness beyond the scope of the world's intelligibility. See his essay, "Die Aufnahme des philosophischen Gottesbegriffs als dogmatisches Problem der frühchristlichen Theologie", 44.

pervasive malleability of all else that exists. This account of divine otherness comes at a cost. It places intrinsic and unavoidable limitations upon God's capacity to act, and thus hamstrings His ability for genuine immanence.²⁵ Divine transcendence comes at the expense of divine mercy.²⁶

Eberhard Jüngel, who articulates an especially rich permutation of this iconoclastic narrative, insists, on the contrary, that God exists *beyond* the sphere of causal necessity altogether, and concludes that He therefore must not be defined on the basis of a purely abstractive reasoning.²⁷ In making this case, Jüngel seeks to *enlarge* divine transcendence (qualitatively), precisely to make space for a robust doctrine of divine immanence.²⁸ The death of Christ no longer contradicts the transcendent being of God, as classical theism has presupposed to the detriment of its own coherence. Jüngel hopes to overcome the "aporias" of metaphysical polarities by suggesting that the divine essence *can* be thought together with death, and indeed that it *ought* to be.²⁹ In doing so, a

²⁵Note Pannenberg's emphasis upon divine freedom in *ibid.*, 2; 14; 29-30; 36-39.

²⁶There is significant reason to doubt that the historical figure often identified with this point of view are accurately interpreted as such. The present author has severe reservations about the capacity of this narrative rightly to characterize patristic and medieval development. The main point of focus here, however, are the constructive values embedded within the narrative itself.

²⁷By abstractive reasoning, I mean reflection, which proceeds upwards from the observation of worldly realities to God on the basis of causal reasoning. A very clear articulation of this point is to be found in Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 33.

²⁸It is the common mistake of both modern and pre-modern conceptions of God, according to Jüngel, to conceive of divinity in such a way that God becomes a prop for the intelligibility of the world, or the security of the human subject. See, for instance, *ibid.*, 181; 197. This shared perspective is ultimately a midwife to atheism, since it ironically makes the existence of God dependent upon our need of him. This diagnosis of modern atheism, and the identification of classical theism's complicity in its genesis, accounts for a major section of Jüngel's study.

²⁹See *ibid.*, 231-4; 100; 188. For Jüngel, there is really no choice but to speak in this way of God, since modern atheism demonstrates that the metaphysical God of absolute nature has now run its course, and is no longer plausible. He argues, for instance: "Christian theology today must make a decision. It must decide whether it will follow Fichte and his theological heirs and renounce the thinkability of God. Or it must (as the only possible alternative, in actuality) be prepared to destroy the presupposed understanding of

theology of the cross deconstructs the doctrine of God forged on philosophical grounds, and allows God's own self-revelation in Christ to unveil the true nature of His deity.³⁰ In *this* way, the fatal polarity is healed. Dogmatic integrity is restored by expunging inadequate conceptualizations of divine transcendence.

The rejection of divine impassibility is but one subsidiary facet of the larger counter-proposal, but represents, nevertheless, the crucial point at which Luther's Christology is presumed to align with contemporary sensibility. Impassibility functions in modern theology somewhat like a shibboleth of conceptual commitments. That Luther apparently rejects impassibility *for the sake of a more robust doctrine of divine immanence* is the necessary lynchpin for his contemporary recruitment. It pilots accounts of his significance, which identify him as a resource for the constructive proposal sketched throughout this section. The passibilist Luther appears to reinforce not only the intent, but also the reconstructive means adopted by modern 'theologians of the cross' in their attempt to codify a qualitative account of God's otherness.

But if Luther *doesn't* reconfigure two-nature dogma in the manner suggested by the divergence thesis (as demonstrated in chapters 2-4), and therefore does *not* pit divine impassibility against divine immanence, how ought the engagement between his Christology and recent trajectories be recast? Must his ideas, thus reinterpreted, simply fade back into the already well-populated *mélange* of thinkers before and after him who appear wrongfully to propagate a fatal polarity within the doctrine of God? Is contemporary theology left with the same deconstructive agenda, even if it must recruit

the divine being 'superior to us' (*supra nos*) in order to think God in the way that he has revealed himself in his identity with the man Jesus." This explanation occurs on page 187.

³⁰Ibid., 13; 159-69. See also Jüngel's essay, "Vom Tod des lebendigen Gottes", 105-6; 112.

alternative historical resources for its advance? In various ways, each of these questions seeks to ascertain whether Luther's Christology can still possess anything other than a merely passing, antiquarian interest, now that his ideas are shown no longer to reinforce contemporary sensibilities? The following section will address this 'receptive' question, by providing a few programmatic gestures of how Luther can constructively inform ongoing theological discourse.

A Non-Divergence Account of Luther's Contemporary Significance

Luther understands immanence and impassibility not as mutually cancelling, but mutually reinforcing commitments. His Christology directly challenges the validity of the widely presumed antithesis between these doctrines, which occupies a central position in the theological trajectories surveyed in the past section. It could be the case, of course, that Luther is simply inconsistent. He is, after all, by no means the only pre-modern theologian to speak emphatically about the doctrine of divine immanence. Like his predecessors, Luther may simply articulate an incoherent admixture of immiscible conceptual elements without realizing it. If divine impassibility is accurately defined in the terms specified by the previous section (I.E. aloof remoteness), such a conclusion would be largely inescapable. This, however, is precisely the point where Luther's Christology makes its initial contribution. It suggests an alternative specification of divine impassibility, which disrupts the contemporary tendency to interpret this doctrine as an obstructive impediment to an adequate recognition of God's intimate involvement with human history in Christ.

Divine impassibility, for Luther, does not signify an abstract, ontological remoteness, which somehow denudes all affirmations of divine immanence of their

substantive meaning (I.E. God is involved *and yet uninvolved*). Impassibility refers, for him, to the ‘*mode*’ of God’s radical immanence; a maximally radiant nearness of incorruptible divinity in the midst of abject human weakness; the triumph of deathless might in the very jaws of mortal defeat. An impassible mode of presence specifies, for him, what God’s involvement in human suffering must be *like* in order for such involvement to count as *redemptive*. Only He who is *incorruptibly* divine can be the Lord over sin, death, and the devil. Only such a One may radiate human weakness with deathless might, and break the power of death and Hades. For God to be present in a mode other than this would stipulate, for Luther, that Christ requires a savior of His own. Luther’s soterio-logic also presupposes, more seriously, that a god immanent otherwise than thus specified would not actually be *God* at all. Impassibility, in other words, is not an abstract means of protecting some predetermined notion of divine transcendence *in spite* of God’s presence in Christ. It is not an ascriptive counterbalance, which restricts affirmations of divine immanence by heaping qualificatory weight on the opposite side of a univocal, ontological ledger. God is present impassibly, because only a God thus present can *redeem*—and only a God who can redeem is truly *God*.³¹

Luther’s Christology disrupts the polarity narrative’s governing equation of ‘impassibility’ with ‘detached remoteness’, and thus calls into question the accuracy of its critical diagnosis in the first place. Divine impassibility does not assert something to be true of God, which the reality of divine immanence intrinsically contradicts. It is not a philosophically polarized abstraction from the ephemera of finitude. It specifies a *modality* of presence appropriate to Christ’s divinity; a form of involvement

³¹For textual corroboration of this summary, see the appropriate portions of chapter 4.

characterized by un-circumscribed, and unassailable, deathless vitality. In this sense, impassibility denotes not a ‘lack’, but a *plenitude* of sorts. Contemporary defenders of divine impassibility have sometimes expressed a similar point in relation to the question of how an immutable God can *act*. Luther’s emphasis is complementary, but somewhat different. His rendering of impassibility in the terms of an incorruptible fullness of life describes why it is that the incarnate Christ can enter death, and yet *save*.

Christ enters death, but never ceases in so doing to be the *living God*. Immanence and impassibility do not compete for space along a univocal, descriptive spectrum of attributes. To pit them as necessarily opposed to one another is, in effect, to commit a category mistake. By illustrating this to be the case, Luther’s Christology exposes the polarity narrative to depend upon an opposition of conceptualities, which are actually compatible with one another.³² A divergence reception of Luther is therefore wrong precisely because it is right. It argues, in effect, that Luther does not affirm divine impassibility because he *does* affirm divine immanence. The argument tacitly assumes, of course, that the two commitments cannot coexist. But if Luther affirms divine immanence (as the divergence thesis rightly claims), and *also* affirms divine impassibility, then the assumption turns out to be invalid, from both a historical and theological point of view. This disruptive observation represents an important facet of the reformer’s contemporary significance.

Despite these various points of disagreement, however, the efforts of contemporary theology to bypass a quantitative polarization of divine attributes

³²Of course, this is only true if ‘impassibility’ is shown not to be equivalent with ‘detached remoteness’. In contexts where the operative definition of impassibility directly proscribes God’s substantive involvement with created realities, the polarity narrative would be valid, even if its proposed solution is not the only one.

nevertheless reflects constructive values that Luther's Christology genuinely embodies. Like many contemporary theologians, Luther treasures a rich affirmation of divine immanence, and evidently understands the transcendence of God to represent no obstacle to it. Insofar as transcendence and immanence meet in Luther's doctrine of Christ, it qualifies as a legitimate proposal of the very sort of 'qualitative complication' contemporary authors seek to articulate. His Christology enacts an understanding of God's transcendence that does not compete with, but actually *enables* His immanent involvement.³³

In this qualified sense, it may be suggested that Luther and his contemporary interlocutors think along an analogous dogmatic trajectory. His significance need not be interpreted as *purely* subversive. His ideas do not simply wag a disapproving finger in judgment of modern improprieties. Luther and modern theology can engage with one another constructively and, to some extent, *collaboratively* in the pursuit of a common goal.³⁴ The crucial question is whether divine impassibility represents a 'help' or 'hindrance' in the constructive effort to outline a complementary distinction between divine transcendence and divine immanence. Is impassibility an impediment to this enterprise? Is it truly a marker of transcendence wrongly construed (I.E. 'remoteness')?

³³The divergence reception understandably assumes that the overlap of intent represented here constitutes a major reason why Luther *jettisons* divine impassibility in the first place. This is because contemporary assessments of the doctrine assume it inescapably to reproduce the bad, quantitative polarity, which Luther's strident emphasis upon divine immanence seems unavoidably to deconstruct. This line of receptive reasoning, however, confuses substantive overlap of theological intent with an alignment of instrumental means. The fact that Luther retains divine impassibility *as a critical component of his theology of divine immanence* raises the constructive question whether a theology of divine suffering actually represents substantive progress in the attempt to specify a qualitative account of divine otherness, as its contemporary advocates are wont to insist.

³⁴The goal is a profound, and conceptually viable emphasis upon God's radical involvement within human history. I do not mean to suggest, however, that Luther is the only pre-modern theologian who shares this goal.

Or is impassibility a necessary affirmation for formulating an adequate conceptualization of God's immanence in Christ?

The logic of Luther's Christology suggests that a rejection of divine impassibility creates more problems for the transcendence-immanence relation than it solves. A major aspect of his intent, in maintaining the partitive specificatory discourse of classical christological reflection, is to ensure the fact that the 'god' who is radically present in Christ is the one, true *God*. The motivation here is primarily soteriological in nature. Only the God who is incorruptible in the midst of sufferings, and immortal in the midst of death can enter the depths of the human condition and emerge victorious. At a deeper conceptual level, however, this redemptive logic *presupposes* what a passibilist proposal intrinsically denies; namely, that the relation between God and the world is ontologically non-competitive. At first glance, this seems an outrageous claim. It is the self-avowed intent of modern theologies of divine suffering to suggest that God *really* intersects with created reality, and does so without ceasing to be God. But is divine passibility consistent with this goal? There is reason to suppose, on the basis of Luther's Christology, that an acceptance of divine impassibility procures this emphasis more transparently than its denial.

Luther's point of view presupposes an abiding complementarity between the radical transcendence of the divine being and His equally radical immanent involvement in the events of human history. The impassibility of Christ's divinity means that immanence does not require any sympathetic 'adjustment' of God's being. All of this points to a decidedly qualitative rendering of God's otherness—an ontological distinction that eschews univocally derived polarities. God and the world simply do not compete for

space within Luther's Christology. Can the same be said of a passibilist rendering of divine immanence?

To insist that God 'suffers' presupposes (minimally, at least) that divine involvement with creation elicits, perhaps even *requires*, a consequent, sympathetic affect, which 'conditions' God's mode of existence in a way that would not obtain in the absence of such involvement. The intersection of deity with sin-warped, creaturely reality entails an ontological 'yielding' of sorts. God is *affected*. He experiences pain, suffering, loss, weakness, and defect—all as the result of His 'collision', so to speak, with post-lapsarian finitude. Does the presupposition of this requisite 'affect' make sense, though, if God and the world exist on qualitatively distinct planes of being? Doesn't the oft-purported *necessity* of divine suffering inadvertently imply that a zero-sum ontological game is still being played; that Creator and creature are nudging about for space upon a univocal playing field of causal interaction?

If the outward conditioning of God's being is treated tacitly as a prerequisite of authentic immanence, then divine suffering appears merely to be the ontological cost exacted by God's genuine interaction with finite existents.³⁵ One finds a dramatic manifestation of this view in the theology of Jürgen Moltmann. He insists that the act of creation itself requires a self-contraction of God's being, in order to make space for the integrity of the other.³⁶ Appraised by the constructive framework set up in this chapter, however, doesn't this view simply erect a competitive ontological relation between

³⁵This applies, whether or not God's decision to suffer is constrained or free. The point is that suffering is treated as a requirement of God's immanence.

³⁶See, for instance: Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 108-11; Ron Highfield, "Divine Self-Limitation in the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann: A Critical Appraisal," *Christian Scholars Review* 32 (2002): 47-71; and Siu-Kwong Tang, *God's History in the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Bern: P. Lang, 1996), 161-72.

transcendence and immanence from the start? Eberhard Jüngel's suggestion that God's being must be conceptualized beyond the limits of necessity is far more satisfying. Yet, Jüngel also toys with the idea that God's relation to creation is, from the first instance, a matter of a struggle with nothingness.³⁷ To what extent do Moltmann and Jüngel actually presuppose the quantitative (and thus *competitive*) ontological distinction that each wants to avoid?

Why should the prerequisite of divine suffering exist in the first place, if the distinction between transcendence and immanence is *qualitative* rather than quantitative? The underlying metaphysical assumption would need to be that God and creation *cannot* converge upon the same existential space without an attendant ontological displacement.³⁸ This assumption shows that univocal polarity is still operative, however, albeit now manifest in an inverted form. The passibilist proposal retains the governing presupposition that substantive involvement requires a *change* on God's part. It differs from an incoherent polarization of transcendence and immanence, only in the sense that it deems the reality of immanence worth the steep theological cost of admission. In short, it does not heal the fatal polarity at all, but reproduces it. Despite its best efforts to the contrary, a passibilist reconfiguration still forces an artificial choice between transcendence and immanence. Ironically, this is precisely the dilemma that much contemporary theology has labored to overcome.

The logic of Luther's soteriology, on the other hand, urges that it is finally impossible truly to have *either* immanence *or* transcendence without always having *both*. The ontological transmutation of God's being is not necessary in order to secure the

³⁷See Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 217-22.

³⁸Divine being, in other words, would not exist above the laws of Newtonian physics.

genuine immanence of God in Christ. Such a transmutation actually *undermines* immanence, because it suggests that the agent with whom humanity deals is someone or *something* other than the one, true God.³⁹ In this case, God is ironically neither transcendent *nor* immanent.⁴⁰ From the perspective of Luther's Christology, then, contemporary theologies of divine suffering legitimately seek to avoid a potential, conceptual pathology, which threatens to endanger a robust affirmation of divine immanence. The lingering risk, to which these perspectives bear witness, is to so construe the nature of divine transcendence that the equally necessary affirmation of divine immanence consequently withers to little more than a husk; an exercise in naked assent without genuine content.

A substantive engagement with Luther's Christology demonstrates, however, that recent theology has applied this diagnosis with insufficient discretion, especially in its critical narratives of dogmatic development. It has assumed that a one-to-one correspondence exists between the pathological polarity, whose development it seeks to foreclose, and substantive assent to doctrine of divine impassibility. Luther demonstrates, however, that divine impassibility is not a reliable indicator.⁴¹ The attempt to rectify

³⁹Does this same criticism apply to passibilist proposals, which retain divine immutability by way of either protological prolepsis, or eschatological analepsis? Such models are relatively more successful and promising than other accounts of God's suffering, because they avoid the implication that God must become something other than Himself in order to draw near in the Person of Christ. These proposals are still problematic, however, because they presuppose the same ontologically competitive playing field. Whether or not God decides from the beginning to be a certain way, the fact that proximity requires suffering signals that the same framework is operative.

⁴⁰Is this alternative conceptually coherent? It may seem not, on the grounds that immanence and impassibility cannot plausibly describe the same agent at the same time. Such an objection merely begs the qualitative question, however, and curiously reproduces the very univocally charged polarity that so much recent theology has labored to heal; namely, the *a priori* assumption that the nearness of God comes only at the expense of ontologically competitive loss.

⁴¹This is not to imply that the pathology is not itself a genuine risk. Surely such a problematic rendering of divine transcendence is at least *feasible*. The more important question, for present purposes, is when and how the problem would actually manifest itself. Perhaps ironically, Paul Gavriluk's book on

matters through an unqualified rejection of this doctrine is therefore not an adequate prophylactic solution for the potential problem. More seriously, the renunciation of divine impassibility actually harms more than it heals.⁴² Theologies of divine suffering do not overcome the polarity, but merely invert it. Luther's Christology, on the other hand, insists with the help of impassibility that God is truly *present*, and present truly *as God*. In this, he reinforces contemporary theological intent, but subverts its commonly elected, instrumental means. Luther points a more fruitful way forward, which, ironically, is, at the same time, also a way back. The reformer whose theology has so often been identified as a fault line in the developmental history of dogma, actually provides the path for a constructive retrieval of pre-modern conceptualities in a contemporary theological setting.

Conclusion

Luther's Christology is significant for modern reflection upon the immanence of God in Christ on account of the following observations:

1. It disrupts widely held assumptions about the doctrine of divine impassibility as a marker of transcendence wrongly identified.
2. It challenges an influential narrative of dogmatic development, which supposes classical reflection quantitatively to pit divine transcendence over against divine immanence.

patristic doctrinal development demonstrates, in effect, that many of the heresies rejected in the early church were rejected precisely on the grounds of their artificially polarized account of God's otherness. See Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). In this sense, we must hasten to acknowledge that Luther's contribution is not exclusive to him alone, though certain emphases in his thought may enhance its ability uniquely to engage with modern concerns.

⁴²So far as securing an affirmation of divine immanence is concerned, the logic of Luther's Christology suggests that God's natural suffering is perhaps sweet to the taste (it seems to denote radical involvement), but burns like fire in the belly (it undercuts the reality of redemption).

3. It provides an alternative account of God's qualitative otherness, which is more consistent in the pursuit of this task than theologies of divine suffering geared towards the same.
4. It clarifies that the point of Christology is not that God is capable of ontological self-limitation, but that He is free intimately to engage with creaturely existents—even entering into union with sinful human beings—without changing 'who' or 'what' He is.

On a proscriptive level, these observations foreclose the suggestion, which this study may provoke, that the 'husk' of Luther's demonstrated adherence to divine impassibility can easily be winnowed apart from the genuine 'kernel' of his robust commitment to God's radical immanence. The intent of such an argument would be to urge that Luther's bequeathal to contemporary theology should remain, nevertheless, much as specified by the divergence reception, albeit perhaps now qualified with the passing historical caveat that Luther never quite articulated his own best insights with full integrity.⁴³ The legitimacy of this proposal would depend, however, upon the assumption that divine impassibility is, at best, an ancillary idiosyncrasy within Luther's theology; a non-essential conceptual pith, which can be shorn away without substantive loss. The soteriological integration of divine impassibility and divine immanence within Luther's theology effectively obstructs this receptive avenue.⁴⁴ The divergence reception does not extend the logic of Luther's Christology, but cuts against it.

⁴³Some already endorse a version of this view, as outlined in chapter 1.

⁴⁴A tumor, for instance, *can* be surgically removed and *ought* to be in order to preserve the integrity of a human person. An appendix *can* also be removed, but doesn't necessarily *need* to be, unless extraordinary circumstances arise. Other organs of the body, however, cannot be removed without considerable damage to the person to whom these organs belong. In some cases, surgical extraction would actually disrupt this person's bodily integrity to the point of its annihilation. Those who hesitantly acknowledge Luther's occasional endorsement of divine impassibility have tended to see this doctrine as a tumor, which can and ought to be removed. They have assumed, in other words, that divine impassibility does not intrinsically *belong* to the governing commitments of Luther's theology. If, however, impassibility is a major aspect of Luther's soteriological logic, then it cannot be surgically removed without severely altering Luther's animating theological presuppositions. It is impossible to say, along with Ritschl, that

More constructively, Luther's Christology furnishes an opportunity for a theologically fruitful reflection upon the *modality* of God's immanence in the redemptive sufferings of Christ. In this respect, the content of his theology remains remarkably pertinent to widespread modern concerns, though not in the manner often supposed to be the case. In contrast with the majority of crucicentric theologies developed in previous decades, Luther retains the doctrine of divine impassibility *precisely in order* to speak adequately about the nature of God's radical immanence in Christ. The mutual complementarity of these affirmations within Luther's theology therefore represents a multiply significant aspect of his contemporary importance.

Luther must be pit against Luther in order thus to guide his thought to a deeper level of internal consistency.

CONCLUSION

The preceding chapters of this study defend a thesis, which possesses far-reaching implications for the analysis and contemporary appraisal of Luther's Christology. This conclusion will provide a retrospective overview of the main argument, and suggest a few lingering questions, which warrant future inquiry.

Reprise

This study has focused upon a prevalent reception of Luther's theology, to which it has generically referred as the 'divergence thesis'. The distinguishing feature of this reception is its consistent tendency to identify in Luther's Christology the seeds of a far-reaching conceptual reconfiguration of the classically developed doctrine of God. It supposes Luther, above all, to bequeath unto modern theology the deceptively simple idea that God *suffers*. In this, Luther departs from the views of previous thinkers of the tradition, for whom the impassibility of God represents something of an axiomatic, governing commitment. Luther's rejection of impassibility alleged by the divergence thesis to reside in a critical adjustment of two nature Christology, specifically as it pertains to the *communicatio idiomatum*. The root of this adjustment consists in the reformer's heretofore unprecedented insistence that Christ's divine nature shares equally in the sufferings of His humanity.

Luther's apparent affirmation of a reciprocal communication of attributes is perceived by many theologians to mark a major turning point in the history of dogmatic reflection. Above all, it is supposed to create the space necessary for a new, and better conceptualization of God's immanence. God is present among His people, for Luther, not

as an aloof bystander, somehow protected from the contaminating defects of post-lapsarian corruption. Instead, He *shares* in human suffering, and takes up death into His own divine life. Luther's Christology, in other words, is supposed by the divergence reception to make it possible for theology to acknowledge the mystery of a God who *truly* gives of Himself and allows the sufferings of humanity to condition His very being; a God immanent in the form of passionate, and costly solidarity. For many systematic theologians writing, these insights constitute the marrow of Luther's dogmatic significance.

The divergence reception of Luther's theology has garnered widespread appeal, in part, because it provides a historical point of departure from which to address pressing contemporary concerns. For nearly a century, the doctrine of divine impassibility has been widely perceived to represent a serious obstacle to the doctrine of divine immanence. The notion that God cannot suffer has appeared increasingly difficult to reconcile with the biblical attestation of a God substantively involved in the events of human history.¹ The residual trauma engendered by 20th century atrocities has only intensified the impression, palpable in the writings of many recent theologians, that a God incapable of suffering is a God who can neither love nor help.

The divergence interpretation of Luther's Christology possesses explanatory power, in part, because it directly intersects with these theological concerns. It facilitates a constructive recruitment of Luther's Christology within contemporary spheres of discourse. Luther's passibilist adjustment of two-nature Christology is deemed significant, in many instances, because it appears to forge a path beyond the opaque

¹This is especially true as it pertains to the revelation of God in the history of Jesus.

conceptualities of pre-modern dogma and onwards to a more *transparent* rendering of God's immanence in the Person and work of Christ.² The divergence thesis has garnered widespread influence, therefore, because it functions so effectively as a midwife to trans-historical relevance. It construes Luther's Christology in a way that underscores his importance for theological questions now hanging in the balance. The contentious status of divine impassibility within modern discourse is especially important in this respect. It represents a major reason why a divergence rendering of Luther's Christology has attracted the amount of attention that it has. This is as true of those who applaud Luther's dogmatic deviation as necessary and salutary, as it is of theologians who evaluate the alleged rejection of divine impassibility as grave doctrinal error. In either case, Luther's Christology is supposed, by virtue of the divergence interpretation, to possess a latent, constructive potential for informing the labors of contemporary reflection. The narrative of a seminal dogmatic divergence effectively culls this formative potential to the foreground.

In its attempt to assess this widespread appraisal of Luther's significance (that is, the identification of Luther as a pioneer of divine passibilism), this study has emphasized the fact that the divergence reception is based upon a specific and largely stable analysis of Luther's theological texts. Whether or not this analysis is historically *accurate* thus represents the rather urgent question, which the majority of the preceding chapters have sought to address. The test of historical accuracy is a criteriological hinge, upon which

²In this sense, the divergence reception embodies Jürgen Moltmann's programmatic claim, enunciated in the opening paragraphs of *The Crucified God*, that the theologian's goal of contemporary relevance ineluctably makes it difficult to maintain a degree of continuity with the past that is sufficient to preserve the integrity of Christian identity. See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 7-31. In the case of the divergence reception's implicit appraisal of impassibility, the cost of continuity weighed against relevance is evidently deemed too steep.

the reception's constructive legitimacy may be evaluated. The interpretation of Luther's Christology, which the divergence reception presupposes, includes essentially three constitutive elements.

- 1) Luther rejects the doctrine of suppositional carrying, and substitutes for it a composite doctrine of Christ, capable of expressing a more intimate union between divinity and humanity.
- 2) Within this more intimate union, Luther reconfigures the traditional doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* in order especially to affirm the participatory suffering of Christ's divinity.
- 3) The suffering of divinity is an essential part of Luther's soteriology, and thus central to the fabric of his thought.

These claims represent the three pillars upon which the divergence reception rests. Its status as a viable appraisal of Luther's theological significance remains intact only if each assertion is shown to be valid.³

The primary goal of this study has been to demonstrate the historical inaccuracy of these three claims. Chapters two through four expose the exegetical deficiencies associated with the defense of each. These chapters also outline an alternative specification of Luther's Christology, which is based upon the careful analysis of pertinent texts. Chapter two illustrates Luther's continuing employment of the doctrine of suppositional carrying as an analogical description of the hypostatic union. Chapter three treats the communication of attributes, and demonstrates that Luther retains the doctrine of divine impassibility as a controlling commitment of his analysis. Chapter four shows how the invulnerability of God in the midst of human suffering represents a crucial aspect of Luther's soterio-logic. Besides its documentation of the divergence thesis' historical inaccuracy, this sequential refutation also entails a proscriptive conclusion for the

³It must demonstrate, in other words, that the structure of Luther's theology *secures* (claims one and two) and *requires* (claim three) the affirmation of divine passibility.

constructive appropriation of Luther's theology. Appraisals of Luther's significance, which rely upon a divergence specification of his Christology, must come to terms with the fact that Luther retains the doctrine of divine impassibility. Appraisals that assert otherwise may secure for Luther an appealing degree of 'relevance', but do so at the cost of historical accuracy. This, in any case, is the central thesis, which the preceding chapters have sought, at length, to defend and develop.

A de-validation of the divergence reception does not, however, render Luther mute in the face of modern concerns. The central argument of this study intends neither to obfuscate nor eschew the reality of Luther's ongoing theological importance. It should therefore not be perceived as an attempt to discourage the appropriation of Luther as a resource within contemporary reflection. The goal is not to place an opprobrium upon constructive retrievals of Luther's Christology altogether, but rather to redirect the *nature* of Luther's constructive potential in the light of a 'non-divergence' specification of his ideas. Such 'redirection' creates the conditions necessary for an alternative appropriation of Luther's theology, which is based upon a more stable historical foundation.

The fifth chapter of this study represents a preliminary gesture of how the constructive potential of Luther's 'non-divergence' Christology might be realized. It returns to the question, treated so often within divergence appropriations of Luther's theology, of *how* Luther's Christology is significant for ongoing attempts to rethink the dogmatic conceptualization of divine immanence. Luther makes an interesting contribution in this area, not because he urges the rejection of outmoded conceptualities, which are already the object of contemporary suspicions. He insists, rather, upon a *modality* of God immanence, which disrupts and reconfigures the ordinary terms of the

discussion itself. The inability of God to suffer, for Luther, is no sign of ontological remoteness, but a marker of the fact that God is present in the midst of death always as the immortal and living God.⁴ In this way, he tacitly contends that it is really only the *non-suffering* God who can truly help. This insight appears provocative indeed, when counterposed against the predominant theological sentiments of the contemporary milieu.

Prospect

The bulk of this study has been occupied with the elaboration and defense of a fairly straightforward, historical thesis. It has argued that the divergence thesis misrepresents the character of Luther's Christology when it detects in his writing a fundamental swerve regarding the capacity of God to suffer. This relatively uncomplicated thesis, however, is pregnant with any number of far-reaching implications for the study, evaluation and appropriation of Luther's theology. Some of these implications have been explored with a necessarily partial brevity within the context of preceding chapters.⁵ This brevity signifies to the reader that the sequential refutation of the divergence thesis advanced throughout this study is less a determinate conclusion than it is a point of departure. It represents programmatic verdict, which elicits far more questions than it definitively settles. The most portentous of these questions warrant cursory recognition in the closing pages of this conclusion. By reflecting upon them, it

⁴We catch a glimpse of this radical simultaneity in a comment Luther makes about the transfiguration, which is cited by Ian Kingston Siggins, *Martin Luther's Doctrine of Christ*, 218. "In the transfiguration, for example, God revealed 'the future splendor and glory of our bodies. For it was a thing of wonder that Christ should be glorified while still in His mortal and passible body. By it, He showed the splendor of immortality in the very midst of mortality. What will it be, when mortality is at the last taken completely away and there is nothing but immortality and splendor?!'"

⁵Even chapter five, which addresses the matter of implications more directly, is little more than a preliminary 'gesture' when it comes to the subsequent task of elaborating upon the variegated importance of the divergence thesis' refutation.

will also be possible to indicate a few significant areas for future research, which sprout up from the soil of this study's main argument.

Luther and Late Medieval Scholasticism

The refutation of the divergence thesis encourages a renovated appraisal of the relation between Luther's Christology and the views of late medieval scholasticism. The present study secures only two, relatively modest historical claims, which inform this relation. Like his medieval forebears, Luther 1) enlists the doctrine of suppositional carrying as a descriptive model for making sense of the incarnation, and 2) rejects that Christ's divinity experiences a participatory suffering along with the humanity, which He assumes.⁶ A 'non-divergence' interpretation does *not* mean that Luther's Christology aligns seamlessly with the theology of his predecessors. It is merely an attempt to demonstrate that Luther does not deviate from late medieval Christology *so far as these two circumscribed loci are concerned*. Such a claim is significant, in a very real sense, only because of the many past interpreters of Luther who argue in defense of its alternative. Taken on its own merits, this study's 'non-divergence interpretation' represents merely a slight contribution to the much more complex task of specifying Luther's relation to late medieval Christology in general.

The divergence thesis has cast a long shadow across generic characterizations of this relation within recent theological literature. Luther's 'reformational Christology' is often counter-posed diametrically *over against* preexisting reflection, thus reinforcing the overarching perception of a sheer discontinuity within the reformer's theological

⁶Chapter four demonstrates the way in which especially the latter affirmation materializes within Luther's soteriology. It does not provide any extensive specification of the extent to which Luther's application of divine impassibility represents a continuity with preexisting tradition.

development. In some cases, it is practically suggested that Luther differs from the medievals at the level of theological first principles. His reflection upon Christ proceeds upon a new heading. It embodies values, which are *entirely* different from the traditions that precede him.⁷

Sites of discontinuity between Luther and the scholastics surely exist. Precisely *where* these differences lie, however, is a question that emerges with a renewed degree of explanatory urgency in the wake of this study.⁸ This is because the previous chapters have refuted the principal interpretive claims, which have perennially mediated the perceptions of Luther's christological distinctiveness. In the absence of these orienting claims, it is necessary to reassess the nature of Luther's constructive appropriation of prior tradition. The natural place to begin in addressing this task would be the execution of a critical, comparative analysis between Luther's late christological texts and the major scholastic treatises through which he became familiar with medieval investigations of the Person and work of Christ. Of particular significance for such a comparison would be Gabriel Biel's *Collectorium circa quattuor libros Sententiarum*, which chapter three of this study briefly accessed.⁹ Luther is familiar with this work. A record of his early critical interactions with it survives in the form of marginal notations published in the

⁷In many cases, it is Luther's soteriological focus, which is singled out as the point of departure from medieval reflection, which is derided as merely speculative. For more on this trend, see the pertinent discussion in chapter four.

⁸In this sense, a non-divergence interpretation of Luther calls for the same re-evaluation of Luther's relation to late medieval scholasticism that other facets of his thought have received in the past several decades as the result of scholars such as Heiko Obermann, Dennis Janz and Steven Ozment. The goal in such re-evaluation is never to mute difference, but rightly locate it.

⁹This text is available in critical edition. See Gabriel Biel, Hanns Rückert, Wilfrid Werbeck, Udo Hofmann, William, and Vendelinus Steinbach, *Collectorium circa quattuor libros Sententiarum* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1973).

Weimar edition of his writings.¹⁰ Reinhard Schwarz interacts with these notations extensively, but regards them to be only a point of departure. In his view, they represent doctrinal judgments from which Luther would later swerve in his theological rejection of late scholastic dogma. Schwarz draws this conclusion, however, because he believes it is clear that Luther defines the person of Christ in his christological disputations in compositional terms.¹¹ Now that the divergence interpretation of Luther's later works has been set aside, it is time to return to Schwarz's original task with new and better questions.¹²

The comparative analysis between Luther and Biel could easily be multiplied by interacting with other commentaries on the *Sentences* from the late medieval period. Luther was himself acquainted with this tradition of reflection, and interacted with Lombard's text directly in 1510-1511.¹³ It is interesting to note, for instance, that although Luther's intense debates with Zwingli over a decade later are often perceived by contemporary interpreters to be indicative of a fundamental break with conceptual commonplaces of scholastic Christology (of which Zwingli is assumed to be representative), Luther's own subsequent recollection of these debates suggests that it was actually the reformer's familiarity with *Lombard* that led him to criticize Zwingli in

¹⁰See WA 59, 29f.

¹¹The only important remaining question, for Schwarz, is precisely *when* Luther shed the nominalist Christology of his early development.

¹²This is precisely the strength of Graham White's book *Luther as Nominalist*. It seeks to interpret Luther's disputations within the context of late medieval logic. The future study, which I have in mind in this section would be similar in approach to White, but would focus even more directly than White does upon matters of technical Christology. Also important for this task would be Luther's 1544 commentary on Isaiah 53, which treats these matters at considerable length.

¹³See WA 9, 28-94.

the first place.¹⁴ Neither this observation nor the larger findings of this study may be taken as evidence that a comprehensive theological uniformity unites Luther and the late medieval scholastics. Surely, this is far from the case. It will be important, however, for future research into Luther's Christology to specify sites of continuity and discontinuity more carefully. Only then, will an accurate understanding of Luther's relation to the dogmatic vocabulary of late scholasticism emerge. The refutation of the divergence thesis merely suggests that long standing perceptions of this relation are ripe for critical re-assessment.¹⁵

Luther's Christology and Confessionalization

The divergence interpretation of Luther's Christology has also influenced recent descriptions of Lutheran confessionalization. This influence materializes in at least two, major evaluative renderings of the period. A great deal of literature characterizes confessional development as a *betrayal* of Luther's divergence legacy, because this period purportedly *reinserts* the doctrine of divine impassibility as a controlling commitment of christological reflection.¹⁶ Others, however, detect in the very same

¹⁴Eberhard Jüngel detects a swerve in Luther away from scholasticism in Luther's treatise against Zwingli, published in 1528. See Eberhard Jüngel, "Vom Tod des lebendigen Gottes : ein Plakat." *Zeitschrift Für Theologie Und Kirche* 65, no. 1 (January 1, 1968):, 102-4. For Luther's recollection, see WA 50, 591. English translation is available in LW 41, 105.

¹⁵Future study could also seek to identify which of the many strands of medieval reflection upon which Luther is most dependent for his understanding of the hypostatic union. In chapters two and three, the medieval point of view is treated in a way that reflects points of general consensus. This should not obscure the fact that many important differences that distinguish between the thinkers and various schools of the medieval period. It would be interesting to chart where Luther's christological views seem best to fit in relation to this wide diversity.

¹⁶A few examples of this common interpretation include Sibylle Rolf, "'Christum und nichts anders': die Kommunikation von Gott und Mensch und die Predigt des Evangeliums" *Luther* 80, no. 3 (January 1, 2009): 158 n. 26; and Marc Lienhard, *Luther, Witness to Jesus Christ: Stages and Themes of the Reformer's Christology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1982), 340-41. Werner Elert, for whom Luther clearly affirms divine suffering, admits that neither Martin Chemnitz nor Johannes Brenz reject

process (alternatively interpreted) the substantive *extension* of Luther's divergence legacy, on the grounds that many of the reformer's theological heirs appear to retain his revolutionary redefinition of Christ's person not as a suppositional carrier of humanity, but in compositional terms.¹⁷ Each of these 'narratives' presupposes some version of the divergence thesis, and uses this presupposition as a reference point for how subsequent theological developments within Lutheranism ought to be characterized.¹⁸ If the divergence interpretation of *Luther* is historically inaccurate, then it follows that a reappraisal of the confessional period is necessary, at least so far as it pertains to the description of Lutheran christological developments in the latter half of the 16th century.

Such reappraisal could begin with the application of the same diagnostic questions, which have directed the present study, to various influential theologians of the confessional period such as Martin Chemnitz, Johannes Brenz, Jakob Andreae, etc. That is: do these theologians 1) reject suppositional carrying in unambiguous terms?; 2) embrace divine passibility?; and 3) envision redemption in terms of suffering solidarity? Johannes Hund and Hans Christian Brandy engage some of these questions, but do so with the assumption *Luther* initiates a prior christological divergence, upon which the

divine impassibility. See Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism* (Saint Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 1962), 228.

¹⁷The most extensive articulation of this view appears in Johannes Hund, *Das Wort ward Fleisch: eine systematisch-theologische Untersuchung zur Debatte um die Wittenberger Christologie und Abendmahlslehre in den Jahren 1567 und 1574*, *Forschungen zur systematischen und ökumenischen Theologie*, Bd. 114 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006). Hund is not alone in defending the 'extension' reading, however. A similar view is articulated in Hans Christian Brandy, *Die späte Christologie des Johannes Brenz*, *Beiträge zur historischen Theologie*, 80. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (P. Siebeck), 1991; and Johann Anselm Steiger, *Fünf Zentralthemen der Theologie Luthers und seiner Erben: Communicatio, Figura, Imago, Maria, Exempla*. Leiden: Brill, 2002, among others.

¹⁸A variation of the first appraisal is found in the work of Theobald Beer, who highlights the dramatic christological difference between Luther and Melancthon. Beer suggests that confessionalization is actually the *correction* of Luther's divergence legacy, because he views Luther's apparent redefinition of Christ to be theologically disastrous. See Theobald Beer, *Der fröhliche Wechsel und Streit: Grundzüge der Theologie Luthers* (Leipzig: St. Benno-Verlag, 1974), 513-20.

confessional writers rely. Since this assumption is incorrect, might it be the case that the theologians of Lutheran confessional development have been similarly mischaracterized?

The present author suspects that a careful investigation of these matters will yield a combination of the two descriptions outlined above as accurate. The ‘betrayal description’ is correct in its interpretation of Luther’s confessional heirs (I.E. they maintain divine impassibility), but wrong in its assumption that this represents a departure from Luther. The ‘extension description’ is wrong in its interpretation of Luther *and* the confessional writers, but right in its identification of an abiding continuity between them. Martin Chemnitz, for instance, who was a major architect of confessional formulation in the late 1570’s, explicitly proscribes the suffering of Christ’s divinity in his 1561 treatise *De Duabus Naturis in Christo*. Perhaps most significant, in this respect, is his application of the abstract/ concrete distinction, which mirrors its appropriation of Luther as described in chapter three of this study.

“...the words which denote the united yet distinct natures we call abstract. And those which indicate the person are called concrete. Therefore, one nature is not predicated of the other in the abstract. The deity is not called the humanity. The rule of the Scholastics is that the substantial attributes of the one nature are not attributed to the other when we consider it in the abstract, but they are communicated to the person in the concrete, that is, by a term which indicates the hypostasis. For it is not correct to say that the humanity is an essence generated from the Father from eternity, or that the deity is pierced with nails or wounded with a spear; but it is perfectly correct to say concretely that the Son of Man ascended where He was before, that the Lord of glory is crucified.”¹⁹

Chemnitz’s insistence that the *Person* of Christ suffers even as the divine *nature* remains impassible is taken up in article eight of the *Solid Declaration*, which states:

“Because of this personal union, without which this kind of true communion of the natures is unthinkable and impossible, not only the bare human nature (which possesses the characteristics of suffering and dying) suffered for the sins of the entire

¹⁹Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures in Christ*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 175.

world, but the Son of God himself suffered (According to the human nature) and, according to our simple Christian creed, truly died—although the divine nature can neither suffer nor die.”²⁰

One searches these texts in vain for any recognition of a departure or correction of Luther’s christological views. In many cases, the impassibilist restriction is based upon Luther’s writings themselves.²¹

Of course, neither the *Solid Declaration* nor Chemnitz’s treatise are representative of the diversity of opinion, which circulated within Lutheranism especially during the latter half of the 16th century. Future study would need to attend to this diversity, and specify whatever subtle differences of opinion distinguish the various authors of the period.²² Even if some theologians were found to embrace divine passibility, however, the confessional norms of late 16th century Lutheranism appear unambiguously to reject such a view.²³ This fact, accompanied by the refutation of the divergence thesis, provides sufficient reason to reassess appraisals of Luther’s heirs,

²⁰Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 619.

²¹See *ibid.*, 619f. This fact intensifies the irony of the fact that the ‘scale passage’ from Luther’s 1539 treatise “On the Councils and the Church” is so often recruited as evidence of passibilist divergence. The very same paragraph appears within this section of the *Solid Declaration*; that is, within an environment in which divine impassibility is presupposed! See *ibid.*, 624. For Chemnitz’ direct treatment of Luther in relation to these questions see Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures in Christ*, 190-94. Also helpful is Bengt Hägglund, “Majestas hominis Christi: Wie hat Martin Chemnitz die Christologie Luthers gedeutet?”, in *Luther Jahrbuch* 47 (1980): 71-88. Hägglund brackets, however, the question of whether Chemnitz faithfully represents Luther’s points of view.

²²Johannes Hund admits, for instance, that the Braunschweig branch of Lutheranism (to which Chemnitz belongs) agrees with the Melancthonians in Wittenberg concerning how to conceive of the hypostatic union, even though the former group also insists upon real Eucharistic presence. In doing so, however, Hund believes that theologians like Chemnitz depart from Luther’s conceptualization of the person of Christ, which is better expressed, in his view, by the theologians from Württemberg, including Brenz. The point here is not to suggest that writers like Hund are entirely wrong in their interpretive judgments. His magisterial work provides a tremendously helpful point of entry into the pertinent debates. The present study merely raises the question whether certain of Hund’s claims ought to be reassessed, since he presupposes the validity of the divergence thesis as the point of departure for Lutheran confessional debates. See his interpretation of Luther in Johannes Hund, *Das Wort ward Fleisch*, 45-65.

²³That is, if there are Lutheran divine passibilists, they seem to have constituted a minority of opinion.

which construe confessionalization either in the terms of a passibilist extension or impassibilist betrayal of Luther's legacy.

Rezeptionsgeschichte

If the divergence thesis originates neither in Luther, nor in the writings of his confessional heirs (a point that would, of course, first need to be proved), where *does* it first originate and *why*? Why is it that that Luther's Christology has come so widely to be associated with contemporary theological trajectories, which emphasize the passibility of deity, *despite* the lack of evidence within Luther's corpus to support this association? In order to address these questions, future study will need to examine the "reception history" of Luther's Christology, specifically as it pertains to developing perceptions of the reformer's interpretation of Christ's suffering. Such an investigation would help to illuminate which contextual factors are operative in the development of the divergence thesis in the first place.

A promising place to begin such a survey would be the religious writings of G. W. F. Hegel, whose unique appropriation of Luther's 'death of God' language has been widely influential within contemporary theology. An identification of the first interpreter to defend the claim that, for Luther, Christ suffers in His divinity, would enable a clearer understanding of the divergence thesis, by locating its genesis within a particular setting. A thorough reception history could also help to explain why a 'passibilist Luther' has proven to be so appealing for such a wide range of 20th century theologians.

Ecumenical

Luther's Christology has often been identified as an inter-confessional line of sharp demarcation. It represents the decisive point at which irreconcilable tensions threaten to preclude the development of any meaningful rapprochement between Lutheranism and her various ecumenical conversation partners. The purported source of the insoluble disparity is variably defined. Risto Saarinen, for instance, calls attention to a prominent rendering of this fissure, which percolates with some regularity within modern Luther scholarship. This view insists that Luther's theology (expressed in his doctrine of Christ) inhabits and relies upon an alternative set of philosophical first principles, and these principles cannot be made to interact intelligibly with the traditionally presupposed categories of 'substance-thought', embraced by other traditions.²⁴ In another vein, Althina Lexutt suggests that the difference resides in Luther's intense coordination of Christology with soteriology—an observation on whose basis she regards recent ecumenical progress on the doctrine of justification as ultimately hollow.²⁵

Some recent literature has adapted the fundamental claim of inter-confessional demarcation on the basis of the divergence thesis. Luther's christological adjustment helps further to explain the widely presupposed, inter-confessional *Grunddifferenz*, which many perceive to exist in this area. Johannes Hund, for instance, erects a rather sharp barrier between Lutheran theologians who reject suppositional union as an adequate

²⁴Risto Saarinen, *Gottes Wirken auf uns: die transzendente Deutung des Gegenwart-Christi-Motivs in der Lutherforschung* (Stuttgart: Steiner Vlg Wiesbaden, 1989), 1-4.

²⁵ Athina Lexutt, "Christologie als Soteriologie: ein Blick in die späten Disputationen Martin Luthers." in *Relationen* (Münster: LIT, 2000) 201-216. Lexutt could easily reinforce her proposal on the basis of the study by Florian Schneider, which argues that Luther develops a distinctly 'reformational' Christology; that is, tailor-made to correspond with his entirely 'new' soteriology.

rendering of Christ's Person, and the Reformed and Roman Catholic theologians (along with a handful of Melancthon's students) who retain the late medieval view, along with the rest of its conceptual baggage.²⁶ The ecumenical result of this historical narrative is the identification of an inter-confessional fork in the road, beyond which never the twain shall meet.

Theobald Beer's earlier study corroborates the basic trajectory of Hund's assessment, a fact from which Beer draws a sobering ecumenical conclusion.²⁷ Despite the optimism circulating at the time when Beer's book was first published, Beer raises the question whether the 'progress' responsible for this optimism is entirely superficial. If Luther presupposes a conceptualization of Christ, which deviates from established dogmatic norms, then such 'progress' only conceals underlying incongruities that impair and actually emasculate the artificially drafted points of apparent, inter-confessional agreement.²⁸ Beer's solution, of course, is severely to criticize Luther's rejection of medieval Christology. Luther's modern apologists respond in kind. They insist, in effect, that Luther's adjustment was necessary in order to overcome the detached speculations of scholastic reflection. Although the resultant crossfire has not yet spilled over into the official documents of ecumenical dialogue, much of the scholarship surveyed in this study gives legitimate reason to wonder whether even marginal agreement on questions

²⁶The source of the bifurcation, for Hund, is a fundamental difference of christological opinion between Melancthon and Luther, which later Lutheran writers were forced to reconcile. See his description of these two poles in Johannes Hund, *Das Wort ward Fleisch*, 45-96.

²⁷We have already noted the bifurcation, which Beer identifies between Luther and Melancthon regarding the conceptualization of the hypostatic union. See Theobald Beer, *Der fröhliche Wechsel und Streit*, 513-20.

²⁸*Ibid*, 13-5.

of Christology between Lutherans on the one hand, and Roman Catholics and Reformed on the other is even possible.²⁹

The refutation of the divergence thesis does not warrant the reduction of all inter-confessional christological differences to indistinguishable shades of ecumenical gray. It does, however, lend an important reminder of an underlying dogmatic commonality, which some recent scholarship has been wont to overlook. It manifests the fact that Lutheranism, Roman Catholicism and each of the Reformed churches conceive of the hypostatic union in remarkably similar ways, despite whatever neuralgic points of difference may linger beyond the broader, foundational consensus.³⁰ The elevation of lingering difference to the threshold of architectonic demarcation is neither historically accurate, nor ecumenically useful. Further examination of Luther's relation to late medieval scholasticism may reveal that much of the discourse, promulgated on all sides of the confessional divide, has been nothing more than an assault upon polemical windmills.³¹

²⁹Of course, one could plausibly ask whether Beer's work is influential enough to warrant any real concern. In addition to what has already been said to address this objection, it should also be noted that the Swiss Roman Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, whose writings are justifiably the object of extensive study within contemporary theology, relies almost *entirely* upon Beer's characterization of Luther's theology. To be sure, this fact possesses little significance for Luther scholarship *per se*, but portends much for the popular perception of Luther's theology among systematic theologians today. For Balthasar's use of Beer, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 284. For a creative engagement between Luther and Balthasar, see Steffen Lösel, *Kreuzwege: ein ökumenisches Gespräch mit Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2001).

³⁰There are important differences, for instance, regarding the extent and modality in which Christ participates in divine predicates in the *communicatio idiomatum*.

³¹That is, it may be the case that Protestant dismissals of the late medieval tradition as quasi-docetic, and Roman Catholic denigrations of Luther as a christological deviant both aim at illusory targets. Like Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, they trot out to war against attacking giants, which turn out to be the hallucinations of historical misinterpretation.

Theological

This study has focused upon the theological significance of Luther's impassibilist soteriology especially for ongoing conceptualizations of divine immanence. This constructive trajectory focus was adopted, because the formulation of an adequate rendering of God's immanence represents a central preoccupation of contemporary theology, and a major reason for its widespread rejection of divine impassibility. Besides the desideratum of dogmatic transparency, however, the rejection of this doctrine has also been impelled, perhaps even more conspicuously, by the pervasive belief that only a God who suffers can offer human beings any real consolation. Dennis Ngien summarizes the salient point with lapidary concision:

"Of what help to wounded people is a God who knows nothing of pain himself? "Only the suffering God can help," Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote from his death cell. God helps not through supernatural miracles, but through his own wounds—his suffering with victims and sufferers."³²

Later in the same essay, Ngien elaborates upon the main point:

"If it were not the very God himself who became sin and suffered for us, what hope of life is left? What God cannot participate in, he cannot redeem. If God has not entered into our suffering and death, then there is no hope for redemption of our pain."³³

The rhetorical force of Ngien's appeal is drawn from the nerve center of everyday, Christian piety. What hope do the sufferings of Christ lend the believer, when confronted by existential distress and difficulty? For many, the fact that God *suffers* offers an assurance and consolation, which easily surpasses the well-worn paths of traditional theodicy. The doctrine of divine passibility is necessary, this perception urges,

³²Dennis Ngien, "The God Who Suffers: If God Does Not Grieve, Then Can He Love at All? An Argument for God's Emotions" *Christianity Today* 41 (1997): 40.

³³*Ibid.*, 41.

lest Christianity be forced to fall silent in the face of a resurgent atheism, impelled by an intense recognition of human history's undeniable atrocities.³⁴ What does the refutation of the divergence thesis mean, then, for Luther's pastoral consolation? If God cannot suffer, what hope can the doctrine of Christ really provide? More pointedly: what comfort is the recognition of Christ's suffering to the believing Christian when she is overcome by the shadow of death?³⁵

The divergence thesis is surely right to suppose that Luther cares about these questions. The reformer's sermons often draw direct connections from reflection upon Christ to the consolation of Christian despair. In a sermon preached in the year 1537, Luther provides an instance of this orientation.

"Thus the most precious treasure and the strongest consolation we Christians have is this: that the Word, the true and natural Son of God, became man, with flesh and blood like that of any other human; that He became incarnate for our sakes in order that we might enter into great glory, that our flesh and blood, skin and hair, hands and feet, stomach and back might reside in heaven as God does, and in order that we might boldly defy the devil and whatever else assails us."³⁶

The refutation of the divergence thesis raises the following question for future research:

What comfort does Luther believe that the *sufferings* of Christ furnish the Christian, if it

³⁴The depth of this indignance has its roots especially in the immediate awareness of 20th century events of mass violence.

³⁵The future study of this question could also make a contribution to the examination of Luther's cross-piety in comparison with late medieval antecedents. For some preexisting literature on this topic, see, for instance Martin Elze, "Das Verständnis der Passion Jesu im ausgehenden Mittelalter und bei Luther," in *Geist und Geschichte der Reformation* (Berlin: W de Gruyter, 1966), 127-151; and Robert Guy Erwin, *The Passion and Death of Christ in the Piety and Theology of the Later Middle Ages and Martin Luther*, Thesis (Ph. D.)--Yale University, 1999.

³⁶LW 22, 110. WA 46, 631. "So ist nu der edelste schatz und hoehester Trost, den wir Christen haben, das das Wort, der ware, natuerliche Son Gottes, ist Mensch worden, der allerding fleisch und blut hat wie ein ander Mensch und umb unsern willen mensch worden, das wir zu der grossen herrligkeit komen, damit unser fleisch und blut, haut und har, hende und fuesse, bauch und ruecken oben im Himel Gott gleich sitzen."

is true that he explicitly rules out the existentially resonant claim that God is sympathetically conditioned by human weakness? In the space that remains, we can provide only a sketch of how Luther's Christology addresses this question.

The determinative frame of reference for this matter consists again in the redemptive *union*, which Luther envisions between Christ and the believing Christian. The hope and consolation of the believer rests in her belief that, just as Christ was raised up victorious over death on account of the deathless might of His divinity, she too will pass through the jaws of death and hell unharmed, because she participates in the unconquerable Christ. Here one rightly detects the echo of an operative parallelism or analogy between Christ and the Christian, which courses throughout Luther's theological writings. Like Christ, the Christian is susceptible to a decidedly 'partitive' analysis. Though weak in the flesh and apparently powerless in the face of death and devil, the believer is actually *mightier* than death on account of Christ. This 'parallelism' is at work in a sermon on John 3 from the late 1530's:

"In Acts 2:24 St. Peter says that death was not able to hold Christ, since deity and humanity were united in one Person. In the same way we, too, shall not remain in death; we shall destroy death, but only if we remain steadfast in faith and cling to death's Destroyer."³⁷

Commenting on the same chapter of John, Luther later observes

"In this way you also become heavenly and will ascend to heaven, and the devil with all hell will not be able to restrain you. We will ascend from the midst of sin and death, and from the jaws of the devil; for a Christian has become a heavenly man."³⁸

The consolation that Luther extends to the Christian in these texts is not that God experiences human vulnerability as a conditioning impingement upon His very being. It

³⁷LW 22, 356.

³⁸LW 22, 460-61.

is rather that Christ truly became man, and by doing so overcame death from the inside out. The Christian may hope, in other words, because even though she too descends in her abject frailty into the abyss, she is united with the One who will bear her up in eschatological victory.

An especially rich exposition of this theme appears in Luther's treatment of John 6:56, which belongs to a series of sermons composed beginning in the year 1530. In this text, Luther considers what it really means to 'abide' in Christ, and addresses how the Christian may rightly meditate upon and receive consolation from Christ even in the midst of present struggles. Not all forms of reflective piety are adequate to the task.

Luther comments:

"Now there are those who hold with us and declare that Christ abides in them. But when trials confront them and they are faced with loss of life, honor, or goods, and particularly with death, when it is a question of sacrificing their life, then Christ is not found dwelling in them. Then mere thoughts are inadequate, for these are nothing but your work, power, natural reason, and a feeble creature. But if the terrors of a bad conscience are to be subdued, if the devil is to be frightened away and repelled, if death is to be overcome, then a divine force and not a mere thought is required. Something else must reside in you, so that your enemies will have to cope with a power which will prove too strong for them, a power which they fear, from which they flee, and which will permit you to carry off the victory."³⁹

The necessary power of which Luther speaks exhibits itself, for him, in the lives of Christian martyrs, who do not waver in their faith, even in the face of intense suffering and death. He continues:

³⁹LW 23, 145. WA 33, 226. "Also seindt ihr auch wohl, die es mit uns halten, die do furgeben, das Christus in ihnen sei undt sie in Christo, aber wen es kompt zur Anfechtung, das sie schaden sollen leiden am leibe, ehre oder gutt undt sonderlich, wen man sterben sol oder verbrennet werden, do ist Christus nicht doheim, da werden es die gedancken nicht thun. Dan was seindt deine gedancken anders dan deine werck, krafft undt naturliche vernunft undt eine Creatur? solle aber ein schrecken des gewissens untergedruckt werden, der teuffel verjagt, der todt überwunden werden, da wirdt eine göttliche gewalt zugehören undt nicht ein gedancken, es mus ein anders in dir sein, das ehr finde eine krafft in dir, die ihm zu starck sei, darfur ehr sich scheue, fliege undt du ihm obsiegest."

“Something must be found in you which will prove too strong for [Satan]. This was apparent in the martyrs. How bold they were, what spirit and courage they displayed when they confronted the judges, fully aware that life and limb, honor and goods were at stake! Such conduct calls for consolation, not for a mere thought. It must be a matter of the heart that a person can face death and every trial cheerfully and say: “Honor, goods, life and limb, and all that is earthly, begone! I am determined to remain here, right here!” Then it will become manifest whether or not a person is a Christian and remains constant by means of his thoughts.”⁴⁰

What is it, then, that furnishes such consolation and imbibes such confidence for Luther? It is not the knowledge that Christ’s deity shares in human weakness, but that by faith in the Word made flesh, human beings who *are* weak participate in His divine strength.

“Now this is a precious dwelling place and something to glory in, that through faith in Christ and through our eating we poor sinners have Him abiding in us with His might, power, strength, righteousness, and wisdom.”⁴¹

Luther later summarizes:

“Christ is serious when He says that you will abide in Him and He in you if you believe in Him. He says: “It matters not if you are still somewhat weak, for I am in you. If you lack anything, I have an abundance of righteousness, holiness, and wisdom; I have no weaknesses. But if you are weak, your weakness is in Me, and I will see to it that I help you, that I drown your weakness in My strength and power, that I delete your sin in My righteousness, that I devour your death in My life.” This is the true meaning and significance, the sum and substance, of this text, that He abides in him who believes in Him.”⁴²

⁴⁰LW 23, 145. WA 33, 226. “ehr mus etwas in dir finden, das ihm zu starck sei. Solches sihet man an den lieben Merterern, wie kecke sie gewesen sindt, undt einen muth undt hertz darzu gehabt, wen sie fur den Richtern gestanden sindt undt gesehen, das es ihnen geltte leib undt leben, Ehre undt gutt. Da gehörrt ein muth zu undt nicht ein gedancken, es mus im hertzen stecken, das einer das hertz frölich mache wider den todt undt alle anfechtung undt sagen könne: fahre hin, Ehre undt gutt, leib undt leben undt alles, was auff erden ist, hie wil ich bleiben. Do sindet sichs dan wohl, ob einer mit gedancken ein Christ wirdt undt bestendig bleibet oder nicht.”

⁴¹LW 23, 146. WA 33, 228. “So ist nun das eine kostliche wonung undt ruhm, das wir arme Sunder durch den glauben an Christum ihnen haben in uns mit seiner macht, krafft, stercke und gerechtigkeit undt weisheit.”

⁴²LW 23, 147-8. WA 33, 230. “Darumb so ists dem herrn Christo ein ernst, das ehr saget, wen du an ihnen gleubest, so soltu bei ihm bleiben, ob du schon noch etwas gebrechlich bist, das schadet nicht, den ich bin in dir, undt mangelt dir etwas, so habe ich gerechtigkeit, heiligkeit undt weisheit die fulle. Ich habe keine gebrechen, hastu aber schwachheit, so ist sie in mir undt ich wil sehen, das ich ihr rathe undt

The point emphasized in this final section must not be misunderstood. It does not mean to suggest that the history of Christ is no longer genuinely ‘parabolic,’ as if Christ does not experience frailty in His humanity. The incarnate Son *truly* enters into the condition of suffering human beings. This ‘condescension motif’ of Luther’s soteriology is not altogether devoid of consolatory significance. The consolation it provides, however, is *not* that the divinity of Christ tastes human vulnerability, and thus joins us in our helplessness. It is rather that, by participation in Christ through faith, the believer shares in the deathless might, which is manifest in the Son’s glorious resurrection.⁴³ A closer examination of these matters would be significant for tracing the history of Christian piety during the reformation era. More important for the purposes of the present study, their further exposition would continue to fill out the constructive potential of a non-divergence specification of Luther’s Christology.

deine schwachheit in meiner krafft undt stercke erseuffe undt deine Sunde in meiner gerechtigkeit untergehe undt dein todt in meinem leben verschlungen werde. Diess ist die rechte meinung undt verstandt dieses Textes, das, wer an ihn gleubet, bei dem ist ehr.”

⁴³Another text, which develops similar themes is Luther’s commentary on the book of Hebrews, composed in 1517-1518. So, for instance, Luther states: “Sicut enim Christus per unionem immortalis divinitatis moriendo mortem superavit, ita Christianus per unionem immortalis Christi (que fit per fidem in illum) etiam moriendo mortem superat ac sic Deus diabolum per ipsummet diabolum destruit et alieno opere suum perficit.” WA 57, 129. Also significant are many of Luther’s Easter sermons, preached over the course of his career. For a helpful overview of these sermons, see Uwe Rieske-Braun, *Duellum mirabile: Studien zum Kampfmotiv in Martin Luthers Theologie*, Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte, Bd. 73 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 201-226. See especially the material, which Rieske-Braun treats on pages 204-5,

APPENDIX: PROLEGOMENA ON THE THEOLOGICAL RECEPTION OF A HISTORICAL FIGURE

Perhaps a historically inclined reader will object that the very notion of a contemporary theological reception of Luther's Christology is *itself* the divergence thesis' most basic, besetting deficiency. According to this view, the fundamental error of all that has heretofore been criticized resides not so much in the divergence thesis' symptomatic elicitation of inaccurate textual exegesis. The problem lies deeper, lingering at the more insidious plane of its implicitly over-optimistic historical methodology. In this sense, the very *attempt* of this reading to appropriate Luther's ideas within an intellectual context predominantly foreign to him is practically fated for anachronistic distortion. If this verdict is accurate, then the present study does not rectify the problems previously identified in the divergence thesis, but actually *reproduces* its incipient methodological defect. By seeking to recruit Luther's Christology as a constructive contribution to modern discussions concerning divine immanence, it risks merely exchanging one bad anachronism for another. According to this view, the 'receptive task' can hardly terminate otherwise than in a procrustean deformation of 16th century data.

Perhaps it would be better simply to concede that theological receptions represent an essentially a-historical enterprise, and conclude on this basis either: 1) that the receptive task ought altogether to be foreclosed in order to avoid doing inevitable violence to the ideas of past thinkers; *or* 2) that it ought to proceed altogether undisturbed, so long as its non-historical nature is forthrightly acknowledged. Depending in large part upon the predisposition of one's disciplinary vantage point, either conclusion *could* convincingly be defended on the basis of chapters two through four, which demonstrate the exegetical inadequacies of the divergence interpretation. The sharp demarcation of history and theology, which both conclusions urge,

possesses an initially appealing simplicity, which seems to address the underlying pitfall of anachronism. Tempting though this demarcation appears, however, neither of its permutations is finally satisfying.

To be sure, both trajectories express legitimate insights that must not be overlooked. The former identifies a *danger*, which ought assiduously to be avoided; namely, violating the integrity of a historical figure's ideas in the interest of 'using' them in support of a predetermined agenda. The latter, however, acknowledges an equally urgent *task*, which ought intentionally to be engaged; that is, allowing ongoing theological reflection to be informed by substantive interaction with giants of bygone generations. Though an independent recognition of these distinct insights tends to migrate in the direction of two very different programmatic conclusions, both rest upon a shared assumption. Each presupposes that a *historically*-mediated contemporary reception of Luther's theology is logistically impractical. Both stress the communicative barrier created by the multifaceted cultural and chronological breach, which separates Luther from modern currents of discourse.

The two proposals compensate for the communicative breach by emphasizing trans-historical *incommensurability* to the point of a reductionism. They urge, in effect, that Luther's ideas are *so* removed from the present context that all receptions must be regarded either as equally bad (proposal 1), or equally licit (proposal 2). But are all receptions created equal? Can it plausibly be claimed that a reception, which demonstrably misrepresents Luther's christological ideas, is qualitatively equivalent with another, which does not? Why not appropriate the valid insights of *both* conclusions, and thus bypass the Scylla of a naïvely defined emphasis upon trans-historical commensurability *and* the Charybdis of a reductionistic emphasis upon trans-historical incommensurability, which is its corrective opposite? Such a posture would

acknowledge the legitimacy (perhaps even unavoidability) of the receptive *task*, while sufficiently attending to the *risk* of anachronistic projection. Is such an approach feasible? What would it look like if applied to the reception of Luther's Christology?

Guiding Principles for a Historically Responsible, Contemporary Reception of Luther's Christology

The goal of this study (especially chapter five) is to facilitate a *genuine* and *constructive* trans-historical conversation between Luther's christological views and contemporary theology on the topic of God's immanence in Christ.¹ The very notion of a 'conversation' presupposes the input of no less than two communicative agents. In order for such a conversation to count as *genuine*, the views of its participants must naturally be represented accurately and sympathetically. Doing so requires sensitivity to the communicative structures and particularities of each participant's cultural and conceptual vernacular. In the absence of such sensitivity, a constructive conversation may well emerge, but one that will tend all too easily to collapse the intended *communicative* exchange into masked monologue.² This risk is all the more serious in the case of a 'trans-historical conversation', in which the temptation will always be to allow modern peculiarities to dictate the grammar of engagement. Luther must be allowed truly to

¹These two adjectives are italicized because they helpfully encapsulate the kind of conversation this chapter has in mind. It is *genuine* in the sense that participants are allowed truly to speak; that is, neither is forced artificially into the vernacular of another. It is *constructive*, however, because the authentic views of each participant is carried into dialogical collision or intersection with the views of others. They do not pass each other by, as it were, on parallel lines of incommensurable discourse.

²In a crucial essay criticizing recent distortions of Augustine's trinitarian theology, Michel Barnes rightly names the consequence when the importance of this preliminary task is minimized: "The dialogue between systematic theology and historical theology is transformed into a conversation between a ventriloquist and her or his prop". Michel Barnes, "Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology" *Theological Studies* 56 (1995): 243-44. This chapter concedes the risk that Barnes' essay expresses, but insists nevertheless that theological reception is necessary. The author recognizes that the preparatory stage of historical analysis (I.E. recovering Luther's genuine voice in the conversation) can never exist within a wholly objective and detached, analytical vacuum. There is no way to achieve a methodologically pure 'historical moment' in which all constructive biases are somehow bracketed or set aside. To acknowledge the inevitable imperfections that attend the pursuit of this goal, however, does not

speak, and do so within the plausibility structures of his own natural intellectual habitat. Only once the task of exegetical ‘listening’ is sufficiently indulged, may his ideas profitably be extended forward into genuine constructive engagement with contemporary currents of discourse.³

Even when due historical diligence has been exercised, the execution of the crucial, ‘conversational extension’ remains intrinsically prone to fundamental risks. The breadth of the contextual gap that contemporary reception attempts to span raises the real possibility that Luther and his contemporary interlocutors will simply speak past one another in mutually unintelligible, theological dialects. In this case, the elicited trans-historical conversation would admittedly be *genuine* (both sides really speaking on their own terms), but hardly *constructive*, at least not in any tangible way. Those who enlarge trans-historical incommensurability to the threshold of reductionism will insist that this communicative caesura cannot really be avoided. This objection again registers an important insight, but needlessly exaggerates. Luther’s theological interests are not limited *only* to matters, which are *entirely incommensurate* with the preoccupations of modern inquiry. There exist, alongside the obvious elements of trans-historical discontinuity (which must surely be acknowledged), also discursive sites of substantive trans-historical

entail (as options 1 and 2 suggest) that all trans-historical engagements are therefore either equally fallacious, or equally legitimate.

³Richard Muller helpfully expresses a similar point with respect to Calvin by driving a distinction between ‘listening’ to a historical figure and ‘using’ him. He states: “A clever theologian can accommodate Calvin to nearly any agenda; a faithful theologian—and a good historian—will seek to listen to Calvin, not to use him.” Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University, 2000), 188. I am indebted to Chris Ganski for calling my attention to this helpful distinction. Muller’s point indirectly illuminates an ethical dimension to the problem addressed in this introductory section. To the extent that contemporary theology seeks engagement with past figures, it is *morally* incumbent upon its practitioners to represent such thinkers accurately, lest one, in effect, bear false witness against her ancestral neighbor. Kevin Vanhoozer helpfully explicates this same insight, albeit in relation to the task of biblical hermeneutics. Hence, the subtitle in his magisterial book *Is There a Meaning in This Text: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1998). It is the role of historical study—the patient and prolonged analysis of texts—to specify and preserve Luther’s distinct ‘voice’, as carefully and accurately as possible. This is a

commonality: a shared canon of Scripture, a shared history of theological reflection, shared questions and concerns, etc.

These sites of overlap are what enable (and actually *urge*) the task of theological reception in the first place.⁴ They explicate the fact that Luther is a formative influence in the pre-history of the modern theological milieu (along with a variegated host of others). His writings and ideas stand ‘upstream’ in a prolonged (though admittedly circuitous) process of dogmatic reflection within which contemporary theology *still stands*. However remote the discursive point of contact, these tangible strands of continuity oblige recognition of the fact that, when Luther and contemporary theologians together ask, for instance: “Does God suffer?,” their otherwise disparate modes of theological discourse genuinely and substantively intersect with one another. There exists, in other words, a shared theological ‘object’ about which both purport to speak, even if in different ways, and by divergent means.⁵ This referential concurrence creates the conditions necessary for a topically circumscribed, and thus historically responsible, mode of trans-historical engagement. It enables a genuine *conversation* between two communicative agents without procrustean deformation. Luther and modern theologians may speak with

task that will always be incomplete, but not to the extent that the enterprise is therefore altogether futile. Here again, there exists a latent temptation towards reductionism (in two directions) that the present study hopes to avoid.

⁴They urge the pursuit of such reception because of a second risk, which tends to be overlooked by those concerned primarily with the hazards of a-historical, anachronistic projection. The risk of anachronism we have already acknowledged, and hope not, in subsequent sections, to transgress. However, it must also be asked, whether there is any less ‘danger’ from a *theological* vantage point, to seek definite, historical knowledge of a past figure without allowing such knowledge to inform ongoing constructive reflection? Wouldn’t theological amnesia invite problems at least as serious as historical anachronism?

⁵Or, at the very least, they are asking about the same object that both agree to exist; namely, the God who reveals Himself in the person of Jesus Christ as described in the Christian Scriptures. They are both asking, on the basis of Scripture, reason, tradition, etc., *whether the God thus presented suffers in His being*. This is not to trivialize or minimize the many differences that surround this point of commonality. Such points represent, however, genuine strands of discursive continuity upon which an enterprise such as the present one (geared towards genuine trans-historical engagement) may capitalize.

different theological ‘languages’, ‘dialects’ and ‘accents’, but they speak, in the case of these coincident nodes of continuity, nevertheless about the same thing.⁶

The final, constructive chapter of this study focuses upon the relation between divine immanence and divine impassibility. It does so because both Luther and a wide array of contemporary theologians express clear and identifiable assumptions about this relation, even if these assumptions are carried into expression with uneven degrees of directness.⁷ It furnishes a doctrinal point of focus around which each of the trans-historical conversation’s participants may engage one another. By attending carefully to *how* these participants characterize immanence and impassibility in relation to one another, it becomes possible to engender a *genuine* and *constructive* engagement between them, and thus responsibly discern how Luther’s ideas remain significant for ongoing theological discourse. Because chapters two through four attend to the precise nature of Luther’s views (thus allowing him to ‘speak’ in his own words), the bulk of chapter six focuses upon the views of his modern interlocutors.⁸ In the wake of these descriptive tasks, the constructive discussion in the latter half of chapter six turns to trans-historical

⁶The task of constructive reception is helpfully compared to the translation process necessary for cross-linguistic and cross-cultural communication. A businessman from downtown Manhattan will be able to communicate with an aboriginal tribesman only once a great many of the underlying linguistic, cultural, and experiential incommensurabilities are addressed. The success of this endeavor will undoubtedly come only as the result of great labor and difficulty, and nothing like a *complete* translation of meaning between these figures will likely ever materialize. Despite all this, genuine communication is nevertheless *possible* because, despite the breadth of incommensurability, which separates these individuals, there exists also a deeper element of continuity that enables a mutual understanding between them—even if that understanding will always be partial in nature. To suggest otherwise is to deny contemporary experience (in which such translations do take place) and forfeit to reductionism. This chapter assumes the same dynamic to be true of the relation between Luther and contemporary concerns.

⁷Luther, for instance, nowhere raises the intersection of these commitments as a discrete object of examination. The same is true of many contemporary theologians, whom the following discussion will engage. Both groups, however, express stable assumptions *about* this relation in the course of their distinct theological proposals.

⁸This survey includes several figures who seek to appropriate Luther in line with a divergence reception, but the point here rests no longer upon the importance of this environment for the interpretation of Luther *per se*. The focus will be limited to the theological convictions expressed by these authors, which foster a particular relation between impassibility and immanence. These convictions extend beyond those who attempt directly to recruit Luther in their defense.

engagement, and asks how Luther's christologically mediated specification of the relation between divine impassibility and divine immanence can make a contribution to an ongoing conversation.⁹

⁹This is not to suggest that there is only one, single strand of legitimate significance belonging to Luther's Christology. There is a surplus of meaning that must be respected, even if this chapter assumes that 'receptions' of Luther that honor his own historically expressed views possess a clear superiority over receptions, which misrepresent his ideas. For a fascinating reflection upon the theological reception of Luther, see Eberhard Jüngel, *The Freedom of a Christian: Luther's Significance for Contemporary Theology*, Trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1988).

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